A window open on the world

The UNESCO Courier

JUNE 1977 (30th year)
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RUBENS
IN PRAISE OF BEAUTY

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TREASURES
OF
WORLD ART

121

Belgium

Childhood radiance

An incomparable child-portraitist, Rubens excelled at capturing the fleeting moods and expressions of childhood in drawings and paintings which glow with life and freshness. This "Child's Head" is thought to be a portrait of his daughter Clara Serena. The eldest child of Rubens and his first wife, Isabella Brant, Clara was only 12 years old when she died in 1623. The portrait is today preserved in the art gallery of the Prince of Liechtenstein at Vaduz, Liechtenstein.

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BELGIUM: Childhood radiance

Cover

This year marks the 400th anniversary of the birth of Peter Paul Rubens, the great Flemish painter. To salute the occasion, this issue of the *Unesco Courier* is largely devoted to a study of Rubens' monumental achievement, not only as a prolific and versatile artist of genius but as a diplomat who worked tirelessly for peace. Cover shows a detail from *St. George and the Dragon* (today in the Prado Museum, Madrid) which Rubens painted sometime between 1606 and 1610.

Photo © Editions Arcade, Brussels

RUBENS

A 400th ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

WE celebrate this year the 400th anniversary of the birth of Peter Paul Rubens, one of the world's most outstanding painters.

The sensuous exuberance, the overwhelming vitality of Rubens, the greatest exponent of Baroque painting, is a joy for ever for all those who have eyes to see. Seldom in the history of art have all the good things that enhance the value and beauty of life been represented with such strength and eloquence.

Through the genius of Rubens, the great traditions of the north and south of Europe—of Dutch and Flemish painting on the one hand, and of Italian painting on the other—were to combine in unrivalled masterpieces.

Rubens' inspiration had robust roots in the life of the Flemish people that he knew from his earliest childhood. And through his artistic skill this people has become dear to art lovers all over the world. Though he never severed his roots, he spent long years studying Italian art at the court of the Gonzagas in Mantua and then in Rome, where he acquired new techniques and became aware of the new visions of the Carracci brothers and Caravaggio.

It is thus that he was able to reconcile in his person and in his art the *Ars Nova* of the north and the *Buona Pratica* of Florence. All that was most traditional and most modern in the painting of his time found equally vigorous expression in his work. This towering personality, poised astride two centuries, was the most accomplished figure of the Renaissance and a herald of modern times.

From Mantua, Genoa and Rome, Rubens brought back not only new art forms, trends and perspectives, but he was also able to complement his vast knowledge in different fields, and to acquire, in the six languages he mastered, all the Western culture of his time.

No wonder, therefore, that his house in his beloved city of Antwerp was to become one of the great schools of painting of all time. Many masterpieces now hanging in galleries all over the world come from that school.

Man of genius, man of culture, man of education, Rubens was also a man of peace. It is not surprising, therefore, that he spent a great part of his extraordinarily active life in the service of international understanding. His intelligence, his charm, his exceptional knowledge of political affairs and his perfect command of the major European languages made him a first-rate diplomat.

But though he served different courts, he always acted as a universal messenger of peace. He fought to protect his country's interests among the tensions of the great powers of the time. In Madrid, in Paris and in London he was always to oppose war and to advocate a policy of negotiation and understanding.

The horrors of war are expressed with agonizing reality in his wonderful masterpiece in the Pitti Palace in Florence, and the blessings of peace are immortalized with equal eloquence in his great canvas in the National Gallery in London.

Genius of the arts, scholar, fighter for peace: all these qualities make Rubens dear to all men of goodwill dedicated to serve international understanding.

Makaminan Makagiansar
Unesco's Assistant Director-General for
Culture and Communication

Self-portrait of Rubens, executed some time after his marriage to the beautiful young Hélène Fourment in 1630.

Photo Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris

RUBENS

A portrait of the artist as a universal man

by Roger Avermaete

THE great Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens was born 400 years ago, on 28 June 1577. Although known to contemporaries as "the painter of Antwerp", he was not born in Antwerp, as was long thought, but in Siegen, a small town in Westphalia.

A trivial detail, one might suppose. And yet it throws an interesting light on life in western Europe in the late 16th century.

Jan Rubens, the painter's father, was a rich and cultivated burgher of Antwerp. An alderman of the city and a Protestant, he was an opponent of the Duke of Alva, then governor of Flanders and a notorious slaughterer of Protestants. In 1568 the alderman and his family were forced to flee the dreaded Duke's wrath.

They settled in Cologne, where Jan Rubens became involved in an intrigue which led to his being imprisoned for five years. On his release he was allowed to live with his family in Siegen. So it came about that "the Painter of Antwerp's" birthplace was determined by Europe's religious conflicts.

Jan Rubens renounced his Protestantism and died a Catholic, and in 1589 his widow, Maria Pypelinckx, obtained permission to return to Antwerp with her children.

Peter Paul was about 12 years old at the time. In 1590 he became apprenticed to a well-known landscape painter, Tobias Verhaecht, with whom he spent two years before going on to spend two years in the studio of Adam van Noort. After a further spell of apprenticeship under Otto van Veen, in 1598 he was accepted as a Master by the Guild of St. Luke, the Antwerp association of artists and artisans.

It is hard to tell what exactly Rubens learned from his masters, solid painters untouched by genius. Tobias Verhaecht was an unremarkable landscape painter who also depicted Towers of Babel and scenes from the Apocalypse. It was his misfortune to work several generations after Bruegel the Elder.

Adam van Noort, whose reputation had a moment of glory in the 19th century when a number of works were wrongly attributed to him, was a mediocre artist who belonged to Antwerp's group of "Romanists", painters who had studied in Italy and whose work was imbued with the humanist learning of the Renaissance.

One of Rubens' most remarkable works is an altarpiece he painted for Antwerp cathedral between 1611 and 1614. It was commissioned by the Arquebusiers, an Antwerp brotherhood, for their side-chapel in the cathedral. Rubens produced a magnificent triptych whose central panel was the *Deposition from the Cross;* on the left was the *Visitation,* and on the right the *Presentation in the Temple*. The *Deposition* established Rubens as the foremost religious painter of his time and has for over 300 years been admired for its breathtaking virtuosity. Painted with a dramatic intensity which is all the more poignant for its restraint, the Deposition scene is composed with powerful sweeping curves that lead the eye directly to the dead Christ, at the moment after his body has been released from the Cross and is about to slump into the arms of St. John. Rubens was unsurpassed at creating a sense of dynamism and movement through the use of curves and counter-curves, but this was the first time that he had achieved such a powerful effect with such economy of means.

ROGER AVERMAETE, *internationally known Belgian writer, is the author of an important study of Rubens' life and work,* Rubens et Son Temps *(Rubens and his time), published in French and Dutch versions by Arcade publishers, Brussels, 1976. A member of the Royal Flemish Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts of Belgium, he has published novels and plays as well as art criticism and historical studies. Two of his works,* Guillaume le Taciturne *(William the Silent) and* Rembrandt et Son Temps *(Rembrandt and his time) have been awarded prizes by the Académie Française.*

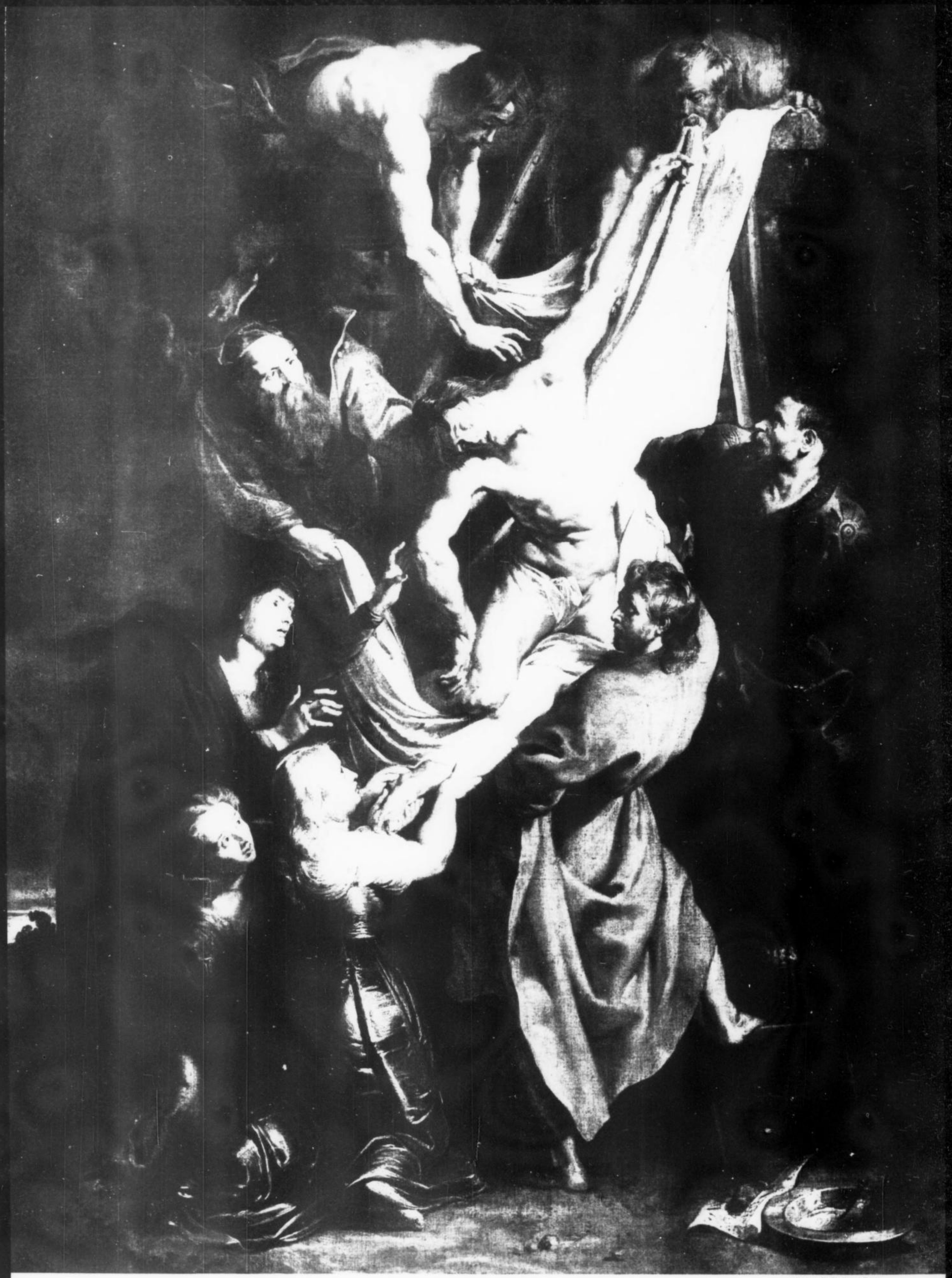

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

The most interesting of the trio, Otto van Veen, produced pale imitations of the works of the Italian masters. A cultivated man with a passion for the art "from beyond the mountains", he whetted the curiosity of his young apprentice and filled him with impatience to travel to Italy.

We know little of Rubens' work during this period, except that he painted an *Adam and Eve in Earthly Paradise* (today in Rubens' House, Antwerp), a conventionally classical work in the manner of Otto van Veen, and a portrait of a man stated—with unusual precision—to be "26 years old". This work, now in a private collection in New York, seems to herald later developments in the art of portrait painting.

The impact of Italy

In 1600, Rubens set out for Italy, as many Flemish painters had done before him. To complete their education, they regarded a journey "across the mountains" as indispensable, although for some of them the experience proved fatal. More than one Flemish painter lost the roots of his originality in Italy. Only Bruegel the Elder managed to resist the siren-call and emerge triumphant. As for Rubens, his great achievement was to create a style that was all his own, reconciling the opposing forces of North and South.

Hardly had Rubens arrived in Italy (doubtless furnished with impressive testimonials) than he was taken into the service of Vincenzo de Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. Like all Italian princes of his age, Vincenzo lived in sumptuous style. He was a great collector and a man of boundless curiosity.

However, it seems that Rubens did not find Mantua an ideal setting for his work, since he managed to get himself sent to Rome, ostensibly to complete his studies. The Eternal City was then the capital of the arts. The great masters of the Renaissance were dead, but a number of brilliant painters still worked there, including Caravaggio, the Carracci brothers and Guido Reni. Artistic life in Rome was passionate and turbulent.

In 1603, Rubens was entrusted by the Duke of Mantua with the task of taking a number of presents to King Philip III of Spain and to other influential people. Some have claimed that this was a diplomatic mission. But Rubens thought otherwise and complained that he didn't even get an opportunity of presenting the gifts to the King himself. In compensation, though, he was commissioned to paint an equestrian portrait of the King's chief minister, the all-powerful Duke of Lerma.

On his return to Italy, Rubens did his utmost to remain in Rome, although his master, the Duke, demanded his return to Mantua.

In 1608, on receiving news from Antwerp that his mother was seriously ill, he packed his bags and left for the North "in all haste" (he wrote) without waiting for permission from the Duke, who was away travelling at the time. He said he would soon be back, but in fact he never returned.

Too little attention has been paid to the fact that a year earlier Archduke Albert of Austria, Governor-General of the Spanish Netherlands, had already asked Vincenzo I to grant Rubens leave of absence to settle some matters in Antwerp and that the Duke had refused. This may well have been a first, unsuccessful attempt on Rubens' part to break free from Mantua.

A number of paintings have survived from Rubens' eight-year stay in Italy. Of the great triptych *The Holy Family being adored by Vincenzo de Gonzaga and his family* there still remains *The Baptism of Christ, The Transfiguration* and two fragments of the central painting, which was mutilated in the 18th century. One is in the Academy of Mantua and the other in the Academy of Vienna.

Other works which have survived from this period are a triptych painted on slate for the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, *The Adoration of the Virgin by the Saints,* a *St. George and the Dragon,* a portrait of *The Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria* and other portraits of noblewomen. Some portraits of men have also survived, such as the curious *Moulay Ahmed,* today in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

These works all display sound craftsmanship, but none escapes the influences of the great Renaissance masters. Their

MANSION FOR A MASTER

When Rubens bought a large house in Antwerp about 1610, he was a rich man, the most famous painter in Europe. Commissions were flowing in, and he was surrounded by pupils and assistants. He carried out extensive alterations to his new house before moving in five years later. As an annex he built a two-storey studio (centre of lower photo, opposite page) for which he designed an Italianate façade decorated with statues and Baroque stonework. Here, in a room over 10 metres long and 8 metres wide, he could work on as many as three large compositions at once. The studio was joined to the house by a triumphal arch (left of same photo), giving onto a garden with a classical pavilion (detail below). Almost entirely rebuilt in the 18th century, Rubens' house was bought in 1937 by the city of Antwerp, restored to its original state and transformed into a museum. Opposite page above, Antwerp Town Hal in 1609 during the Twelve-Year Truce (see article page 23), in an engraving by Visscher, a contemporary of Rubens.

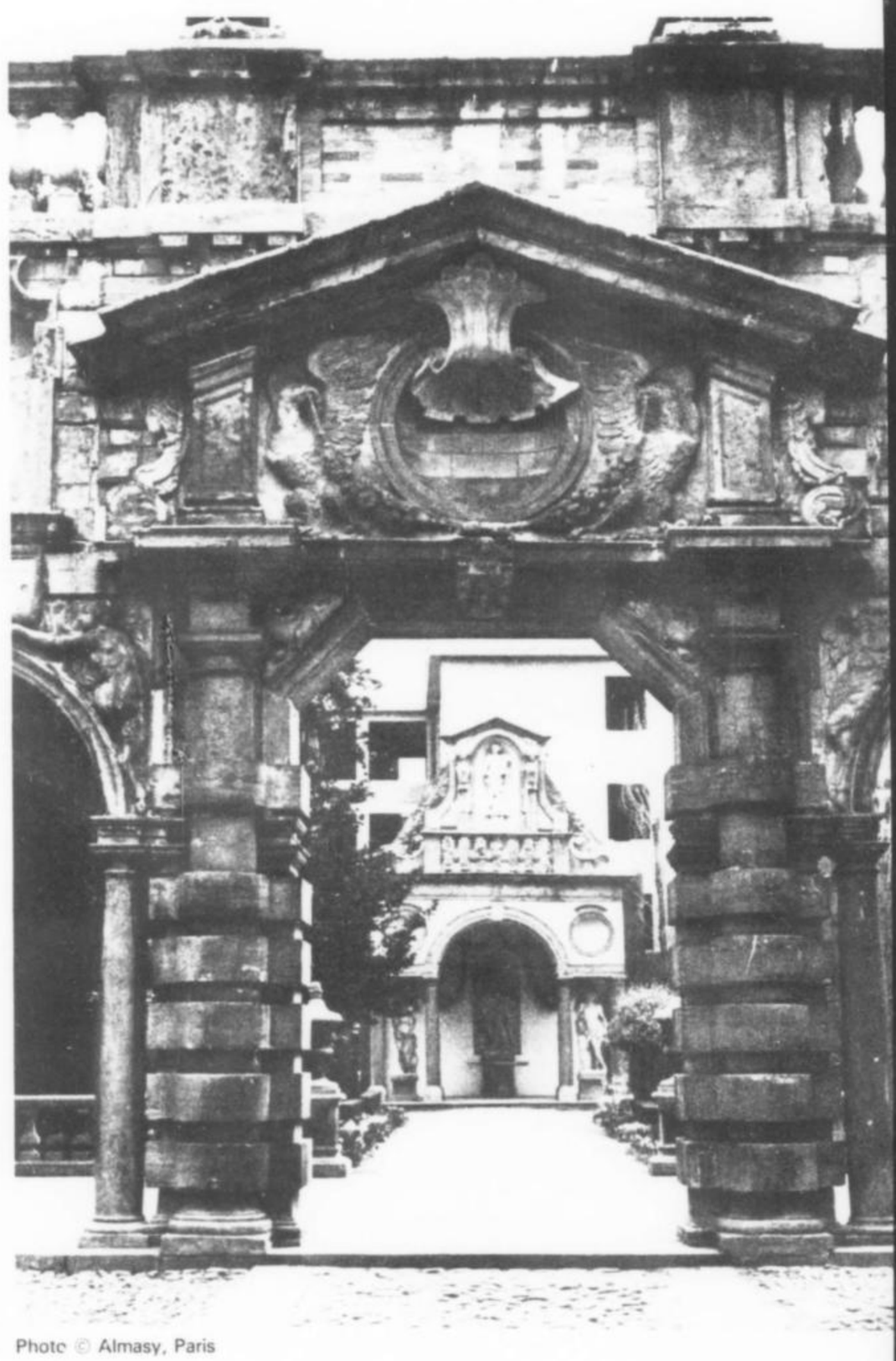

Photo © Almasy, Paris

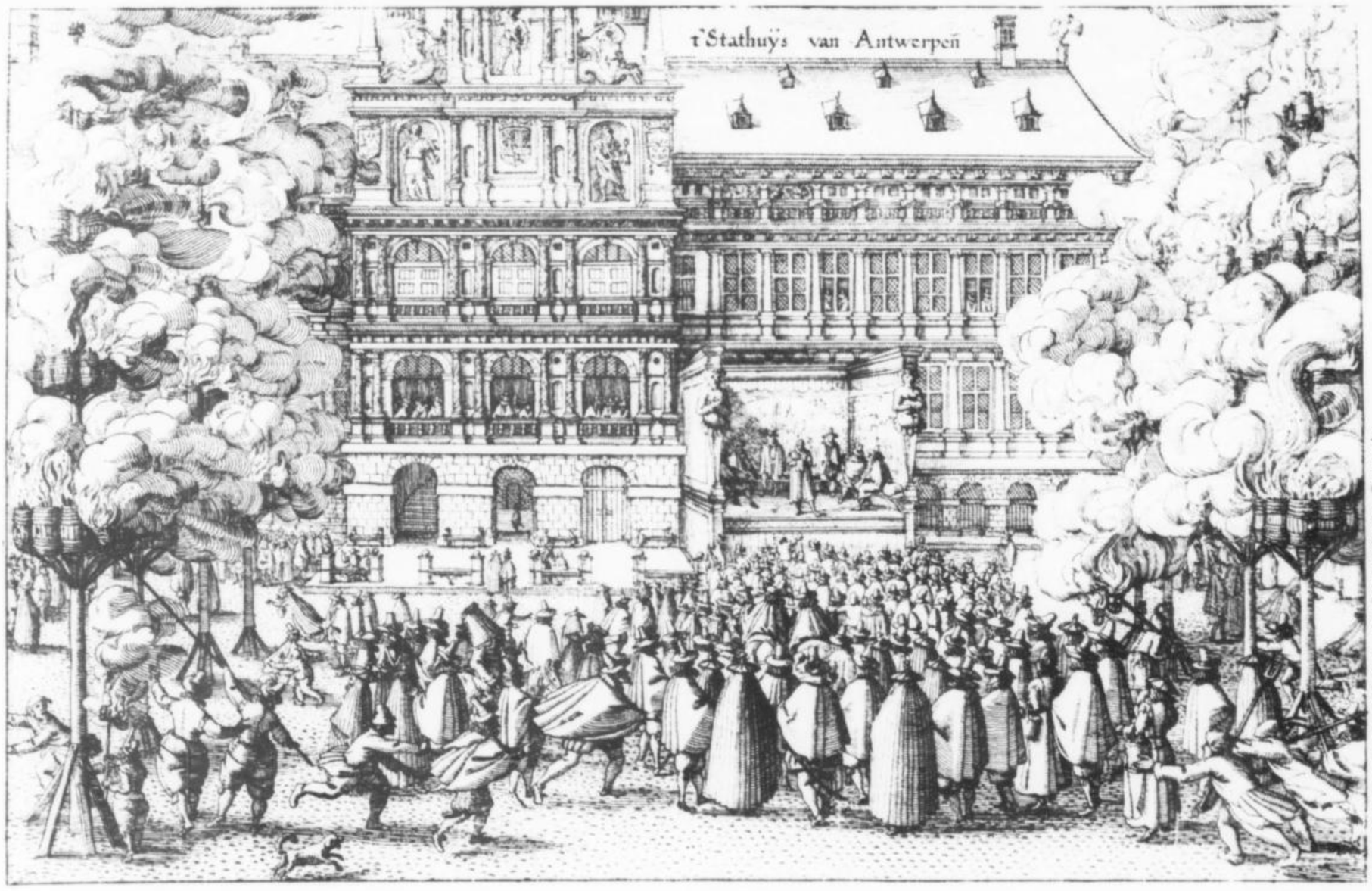

Photo © Department of Prints, the Royal Library, Brussels

Photo © Rubens' House, Antwerp

composition is calm and ordered; the colours lack any personal touch.

Rubens received a warm welcome from the rulers of the Spanish Netherlands, who immediately commissioned portraits of themselves from him. The painter decided to settle in Antwerp and made his home there for the rest of his life. Commissions soon began to pour in. He painted an *Adoration of the Kings* for Antwerp's Town Hall which made a great impression. Traces of Caravaggio's influence can be detected in this work.

The *Elevation of the Cross* which he executed for St. Walburga's Church in Antwerp marks a further stage in Rubens' development and is still one of his most popular works. Constructed along a diagonal, the painting creates an impression of dynamism and movement, with its astonishingly muscular figures and its athletic Christ on the Cross. In fact it looks more like a hymn to life than a death-scene.

In Rubens' next major painting, the *Deposition from the Cross,* the effect is less tempestuous and the colours are in general more sombre, although the figures are just as muscular as in the *Elevation* and the gloominess of the scene is mitigated by a fine sweep of red.

Thus Rubens embarked upon his extraordinary career in Antwerp. He was soon inundated with commissions. There was a great demand for paintings of religious subjects, reflecting the spirit of the Counter-Reformation sparked off by the Council of Trent. The Catholics countered the severity of the Lutherans and the Calvinists with images that were more numerous and above all more attractive. At the same time, the influence of humanism made it permissible to depict mythological themes. This was an ideal climate for an artist like Rubens who loved life in all its multifarious forms, especially men, women, children, and animals.

The nude triumphant

This love of life found expression in his work through his exaltation of the nude. The masters of the Renaissance, from Michelangelo to Titian, had given the nude figure a prominent place in their work, but none of them ever showed such a marked predilection for it as Rubens. The Old and the New Testaments certainly offered a wealth of subjects, but afforded few opportunities for painting the female nude. In mythology, on the other hand, nymphs and goddesses abound, and since in Rubens' imagination they were never clothed, they provided him with an inexhaustible supply of models.

Photo © Bulloz, Pitti Palace, Florence

PHILOSOPHERS AND CLASSICISTS

This painting, executed around 1612, is entitled "The Four Philosophers", although not all those portrayed were, strictly speaking, philosophers. Grouped beneath a bust of Seneca are (from right to left) the Latin scholar Jan Woverius, the Stoic philosopher Justus Lipsius, Rubens' brother Philip—a disciple of Lipsius—and Rubens himself. The work, with its background of Classical ruins, documents the vogue for Greek and Latin learning in early 17th century Europe.

Photo © National Gallery, London

Gradually there emerged a type of woman, buxom and pale-skinned, which was to recur so often in Rubens' painting that people came to believe that it was a representative likeness of Antwerp women in general. (However, it is known that the models for the naiads in *The Reception of Marie de Medici at Marseilles* were Italian.)

Some of Rubens' vast canvases are crowded with nude figures. Among them are two *Last Judgements* depicting clusters of mingling men and women, and a delightful panel entitled *The Infant Jesus, St. John and two Angels,* showing four children, one of them a cherub with a lamb and a basket of fruit.

Rubens derived constant inspiration from men, women and children. The nude is everywhere triumphant in his mythological paintings such as *Nymphs and Satyrs; Ceres, Bacchus, Venus and Love; Neptune and Amphytrite;* and even the *Four Parts of the World.* Obviously it was more difficult to introduce nude figures into paintings of religious subjects. Christ, and the Infant Jesus in the *Holy Family* were the only appropriate occasions—with the possible exception of the *Adoration of the Kings.* In the latter, however, one of Rubens' favourite subjects, the crowds thronging the scene and the splendour of the costumes tend to distract attention from the newborn babe.

Rubens was a competent portraitist, but during these early years, not a brilliant one, although an exception should perhaps be made for the portrait he painted of himself and his young wife, Isabella Brant, whom he married in 1609.

Another much admired work from this period is the painting known as *The Four Philosophers,* a portrayal of the scholar Justus Lipsius with his pupils Jan Woverius and Rubens' brother Philip on either side of him, and, in the background, Rubens himself.

Later Rubens was to develop a more expansive manner, but he had already moved far from the style of his predecessors. To appreciate this one has only to look back to the portraits of the 16th-century Dutch painter Antonio Moro, with their deep concern for visual analysis, where truth comes before beauty.

Rubens saw things otherwise. He did not forget the manner of the Renaissance masters and idealized his models with a subtlety that delighted them. Van Dyck was to learn this lesson and make his fortune thereby.

For a long time, landscape merely served as a background for the groups of people which occupy the centre of the stage. Later, however, it came to occupy a far from negligible place in Rubens' paintings, bearing as always the unmistakable stamp of his genius.

It was probably to give free rein to his taste for movement that Rubens painted a series of hunting scenes: depicting a wolf; a lion and a leopard; a crocodile and a hippopotamus; a wild boar; and a lion. These are tumultuous paintings in which men and beasts are locked in furious combat.

Rubens' horses are always magnificent animals of unrivalled beauty. In his first equestrian portrait, depicting the Duke of Lerma astride his mount, the steed is drawn with unequalled grace. Mane and tail streaming in the wind, Rubens' horses are involved in countless adventures. They are the main protagonists in *The Battle of the Amazons,* a masterly example of perfectly-balanced composition despite the turmoil of the scene.

In the midst of all this activity, Rubens still found time to indulge in architecture. He bought a house on the Wapper (a canal which had once formed part of the moat of Antwerp's fortifications) and spent three years carrying out alterations to it. His designs were clearly inspired by the Italian palazzi he had so admired. He even published a book on Genoese architecture, *Palazzi di Genova,* with the declared aim of combatting the Gothic style which, like Vasari, he thought barbaric.

People said that his house, together with that of his friend ▶

Photo © Almasy, Paris

Wealthy and successful, a happy husband and father, Rubens felt an increasing need as he grew older to withdraw from his crowded professional and social life in Antwerp. In 1635 he bought a country retreat, the Château of Steen (left), a manor in the Flemish Renaissance style with a moat, a drawbridge, an orchard and gardens. In addition he purchased woods and fields nearby. Here he began to paint peaceful landscapes, depicting the lush farmland in all its variety of light, mood and season. In one of his most beautiful portrayals of the countryside around the château (opposite page), the mellow evening light strikes through trees onto the façade and glinting window-panes of the mansion (far left of painting). These "sunset years" in the Flemish countryside also inspired him to paint the famous scene of peasant revelry known as *La Kermesse*.

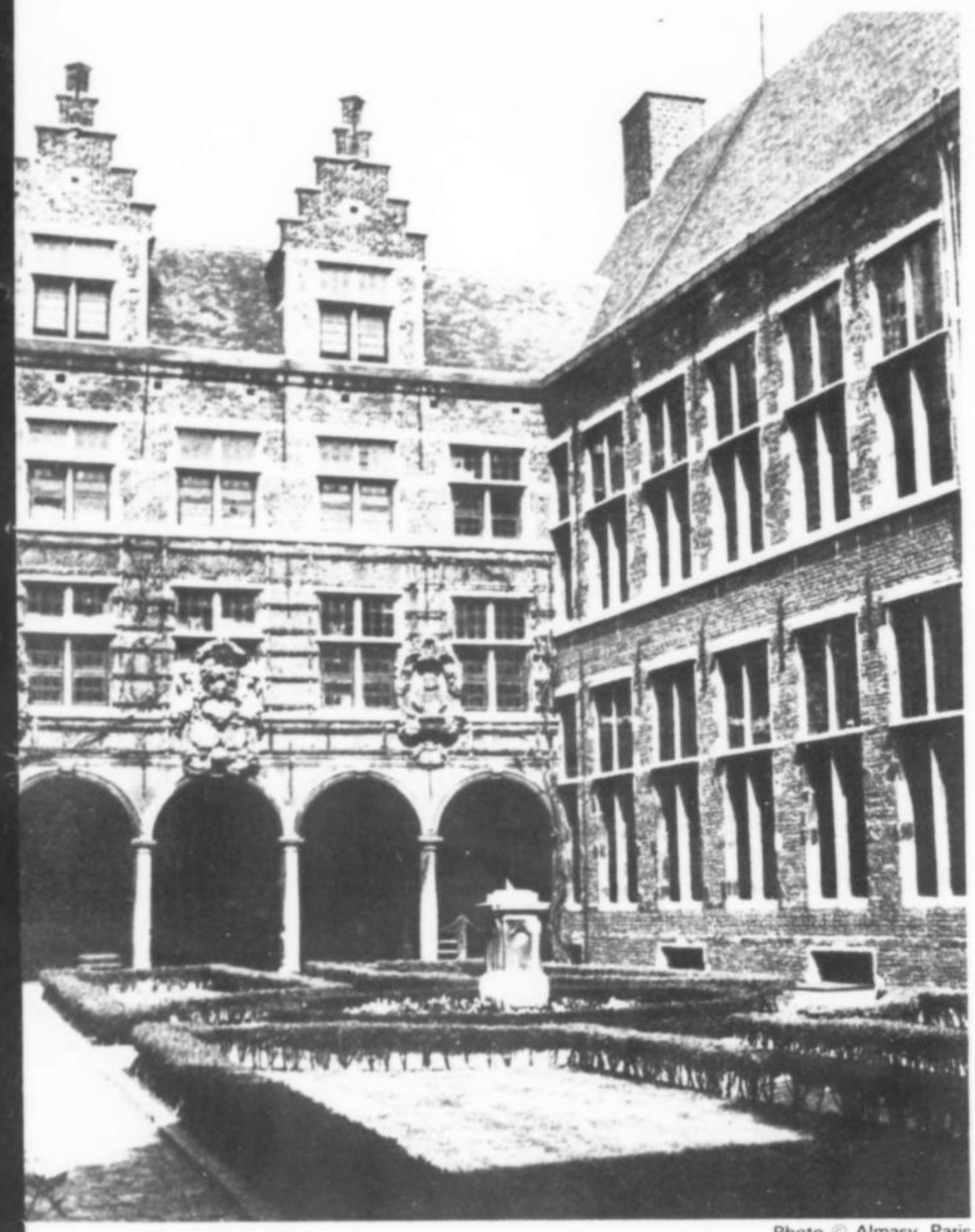

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Photo © Almasy, Paris

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Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Plantin Museum, Antwerp

RUBENS THE

As well as producing a gigantic output of paintings, for 25 years Rubens supplied the Plantin printing-house in Antwerp with many designs for title pages and book illustrations. The Plantin press was founded by Christophe Plantin (1530-1589), a Frenchman who settled in Antwerp and became the most celebrated printer of his time. By 1576 he had 16 presses and was working virtually on an industrial scale. In 34 years he published over 1,500 works, ranging from anatomical treatises and atlases to Bibles, including the renowned "Polyglot Bible", an ambitious attempt to fix the original text of the Old and New Testaments on a scientific basis. Rubens was a lifelong friend of Balthasar Moretus, Plantin's grandson, who became head of the press and had unlimited confidence in Rubens' capacities as an illustrator. In his work for Moretus, Rubens developed a new style of book illustration through designs displaying a wealth of allegorical motifs, symbols, emblems and

Balthasar Moretus (the grandson of the great printer Christophe Plantin) was one of the finest in Antwerp. Rubens wanted to furnish it with antique marble statues and to this end he began negotiations with the English Ambassador, Sir Dudley Carleton. The resultant haggling between these two equally wily dealers, each out to get the better of the other, is a highly entertaining episode.

In 1619, Rubens painted *The Last Communion of St. Francis of Assisi.* Despite the angels thronging the scene, this is one of his few paintings expressing pain. Not long afterwards, he received an important commission for 36 ceilings and three altarpieces for the new Jesuit church in Antwerp (today the church of St. Charles Borromeo). The church was gutted by fire in 1718 and all Rubens' work perished in the flames, except for the three altarpieces.

A helping hand from van Dyck and Brueghel

A mounting flood of commissions meant that Rubens had to take on experienced assistants to help him. These were not mere pupils as has often been suggested; even renowned artists such as Jan Brueghel and Frans Snyders were happy to undertake this sort of work.

Antony van Dyck also worked for a time with Rubens, after being received into the Guild of St. Luke. This collaboration between the master and his young rival produced at least one masterpiece, the *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus.* Rubens and van Dyck also worked together on the cartoons for a tapestry recounting the story of the Roman Consul Decius Mus.

Van Dyck did not stay long in the service of Rubens. Other assistants took his place. There was never any lack of applicants. Jan Wildens and Lucas van Uden painted landscapes; Theo van

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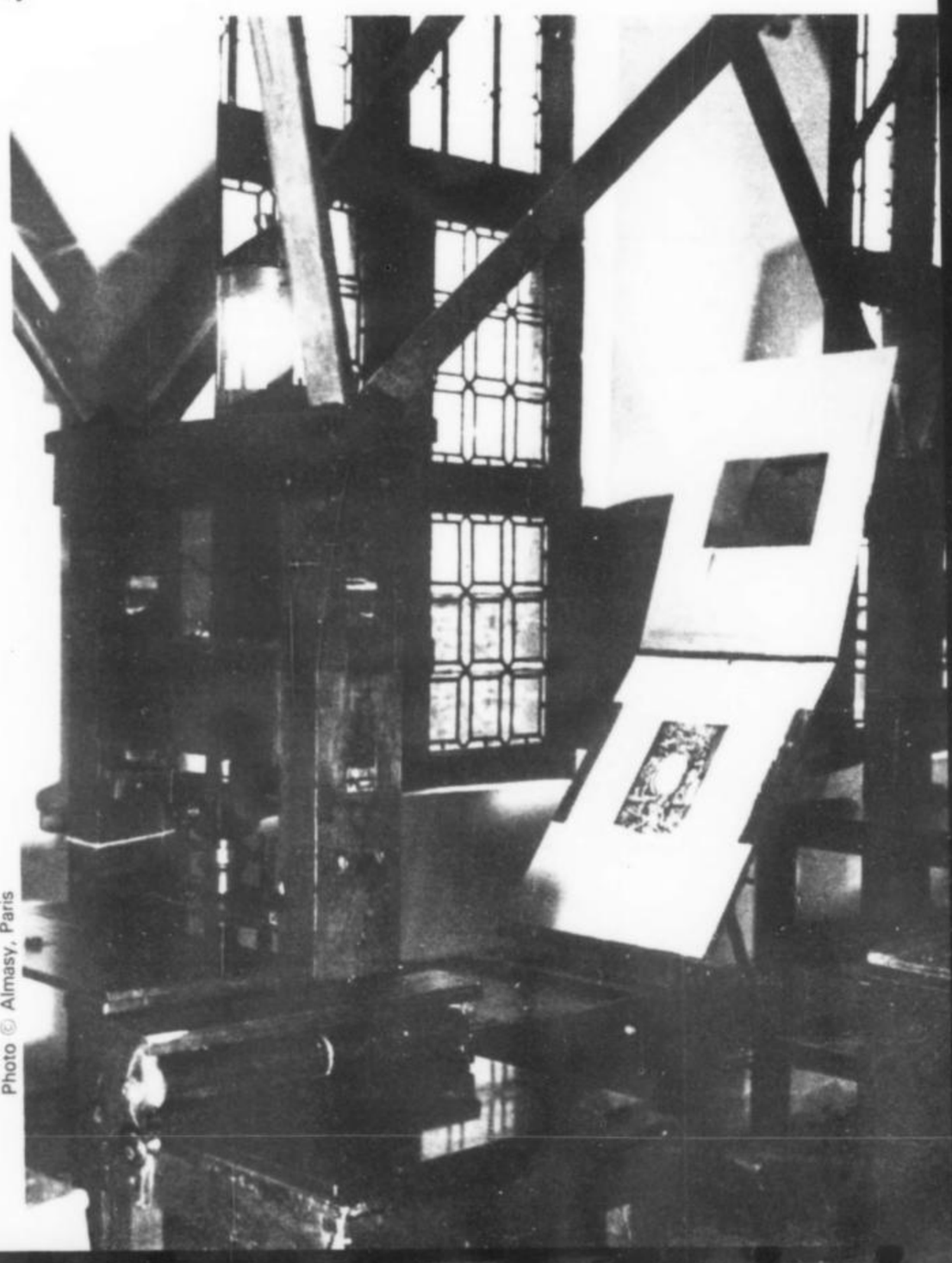

Photo © Almasy, Paris

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Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Plantin Museum, Antwerp

BOOK-ILLUSTRATOR

**figures from Greek mythology.
Although not himself an engraver, Rubens was instrumental in creating a whole new school of engraving, working closely with a carefully-chosen group of print-makers and often correcting the first pulls of a print with pen or brush. As an illustrator he turned his hand to a variety of subjects, from treatises on optics to historical compilations, travel books and philosophical works. Photos on this double page show (1) the courtyard of the Plantin printing house in Antwerp, today the Plantin Museum; (2) a portrait of Christophe Plantin by Rubens ; (3) Martine Plantin, Christophe's daughter; (4) printing presses (left) in the Plantin workshop; and (5) a title page designed by Rubens for a historical work, *La Reddition de Breda* (The Surrender of Breda). It is seen at various stages of production. Above left, Rubens' original design; above right, the engraved copper plate; and below right, as it appeared in the book.**

5

Photo © Almasy, Paris

Thulden, Justus van Egmont, Abraham van Diepenbeek and Erasmus Quellin specialized in figures; Paul de Vos painted animals. This list of Rubens' collaborators is far from complete. Curiously, once these painters set up on their own account they seemed to run out of inspiration.

Rubens was a hard task-master, but he was perfectly capable of adapting to the manner of a talented assistant. *Adam and Eve in Paradise,* painted in collaboration with Jan Brueghel, has been called "a masterpiece of understanding between the greatest genius and the subtlest talent in 17th-century Flemish painting".

While never ceasing to paint, Rubens gradually became involved in other activities. Events were to provide him with an opportunity of playing a part in politics, in which he was passionately interested. The Twelve-Year Truce between Spain and the United Dutch Provinces expired in 1621 and a resumption of hostilities seemed inevitable.

Rubens was a staunch pacifist, and he set out to promote peace—no easy task at that time. Spain was proud and Holland was unyielding. The painter sought to use his brilliant circle of friends and acquaintances to ease his entry into public life. After the death of the Archduke Albert, in 1621, the Archduchess employed his services on more than one occasion. He was sent to Holland to sound out the prospects for peace, but in vain.

Scenes from the life of a scheming queen

Rubens the artist, on the other hand, was as successful as ever. In 1622, he was summoned to Paris, where Marie de Medici, the Queen Mother, asked him to decorate a gallery in her newly-built Luxembourg Palace.

The subject was a tricky one. The artist was asked to paint 20-odd episodes from the scheming Queen Mother's none-too-glorious life. But imagination can help to surmount most obstacles. A combination of allegory and symbols, with a sprinkling of mythology, provided a brilliant camouflage for history, and Rubens managed to skirt round a number of embarrassing episodes (although not quite enough for Richelieu, who ordered certain alterations).

Thus was created the famous Medici Gallery, today one of the glories of the Louvre. It is not Rubens' greatest work, and certain contemporaries criticized him for his excessive and often obscure use of allegory. Even so, it was a gigantic undertaking, one that few painters could have brought to completion. It required two years' work, although it did not prevent him from completing other works in the meantime, notably his finest version of *The Adoration of the Kings* (Antwerp).

After completing the Medici Gallery, Rubens returned once more to Paris to discuss the pictures needed for a second gallery, whose decoration was to be devoted to the life of King Henry IV. This project never came to fruition, and only a few brilliant sketches have survived to testify that the lusty king inspired the artist better than his scheming wife.

Fortunately, there were compensations: Louis XIII had commissioned the designs for 12 tapestries telling the story of the Roman Emperor Constantine. At this time, Rubens also made the acquaintance of the Duke of Buckingham, the all-powerful favourite of two English kings, James I, and his son Charles I.

He painted a portrait of the flamboyant Duke and cultivated his company. Their relations were not without political overtones on either side, and Buckingham, probably eager to win over a man of such high standing at the Brussels court, paid Rubens a fabulous price for the collection of statues that the painter had earlier purchased from Sir Dudley Carleton.

In quest of peace in Madrid and London

For several years, Europe had been involved in the bloody conflict known to history as the Thirty Years' War. Buckingham was seeking peace with Spain and Rubens embarked on skilful manœuvrings that led to his being summoned to Madrid to prepare the ground for discussions.

CONTINUED PAGE 16

Vive la femme !

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

Portrait of Isabella Brant (Dijon Museum, France)

Rubens was one of the greatest painters of women—and especially the nude female form—who ever lived. He excelled in depicting milk-white flesh, glossy curls, graceful gestures, the hollows and curves of the body. When a widower of 53, he married the 16-year-old Hélène Fourment. Breaking the news to one of his friends, he wrote, "It would have been hard for me to exchange the priceless treasure of liberty for the embraces of an old woman." He painted many portraits of Hélène, sometimes playing with her children, sometimes richly adorned, and once clad only in a fur cloak. She also served as a model for many of his mythological and religious scenes (such as *The Education of the Virgin,* opposite page below, and *The Judgement of Paris,* below, where she appears as the naked Venus in centre of painting). Of his first wife, Isabella Brant, who died prematurely in 1626, Rubens also painted unforgettable portraits reflecting the gentleness and serenity which enchanted him both as husband and painter.

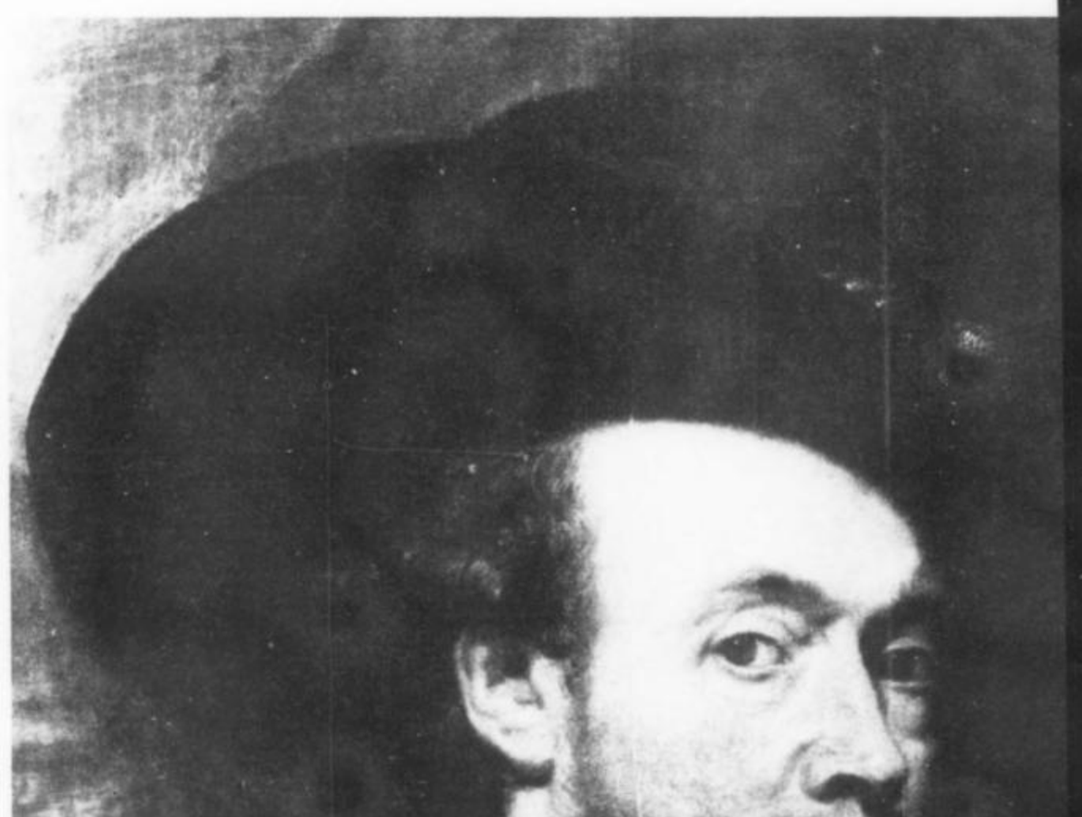


Photo Haesaerts and Stork, Brussels

Self-portrait of Rubens painted around 1624 (Windsor Castle, England)

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

The Judgement of Paris (Prado Museum, Madrid)

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

Portrait of Hélène Fourment (Museum of The Hague, Netherlands)

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

Hélène Fourment and her children (Louvre Museum, Paris)

Photo © Bulloz, Paris

The Education of the Virgin (Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp)

The Spanish prime minister, Count Duke Olivares, was unenthusiastic about opening peace negotiations with England, but Rubens won over Philip IV, who preferred painting to politics. At all events, the painter was eventually entrusted with an official peace mission to London. Before he left he was given the honorific title of "Secretary to the Privy Council", since it was considered unfitting that proud Spain should be represented by a man who "worked with his hands"

While in Madrid, Rubens spent much of his time painting, and is said to have produced 30-odd works during his stay. He also managed to persuade the King to buy the paintings he had had the foresight to bring with him. In his spare time, he met and frequently conversed with the young Sevillian, Velasquez, the indefatigable painter of the Spanish king and his court.

Rubens' visit to England was a personal triumph. The king commissioned a series of paintings, representing the blessings of his father's reign, to decorate the ceiling of the great Banqueting House in Whitehall, and knighted the artist on the eve of his departure. Diplomatically, the trip was less successful. After a year and a half's absence, Rubens returned home disappointed. The records tell us nothing about the work of his studio during this period.

In the year of his return to Antwerp, he married Hélène Fourment, then aged 16. His first wife, Isabella Brant, who had died in 1626, had borne him a daughter, Clara Serena (who died young) and two sons, the elder of whom was the same age as his new wife.

This plump, blond young woman was henceforth to appear in many of his works, as Venus, Andromeda, St. Cecilia, Diana, one of the "Three Graces" and as a goddess in the *Judgement of Paris.* She also posed as plain Hélène Fourment, richly adorned, with her husband or with her children, or even virtually naked, as in the painting known as *The Little Fur.*

It seems that Rubens wished to abandon politics at this time, for he turned down an offer to return to England on another mission. The next year, however, he was once more in the thick of things. Marie de Medici had been forced to flee from France and arrived in Mons, where Rubens was delegated to welcome her. The Queen Mother's misfortunes led him to urge Olivares to support armed intervention on behalf of her intrigue-ridden entourage. The peace-loving Rubens had become overnight an advocate of war! However, his petition came to naught, for Madrid would have none of it. The artist returned to his brushes and easel, the best thing he could have done.

The last ten years of his life were as prolific as those that had gone before but his style became increasingly subtle. As in the past he continued to paint both religious and secular subjects. The latter became more and more sensual, while his treatment of religious themes reflects a greater tenderness and tranquility than his earlier work.

Paintings such as the *Offering to Venus,* with its angels dancing about the goddess or perched in the trees above her, and with its amorously entwined couples, exude *joie de vivre* through their fresh colours, their spirited sense of movement and the gaiety of the children.

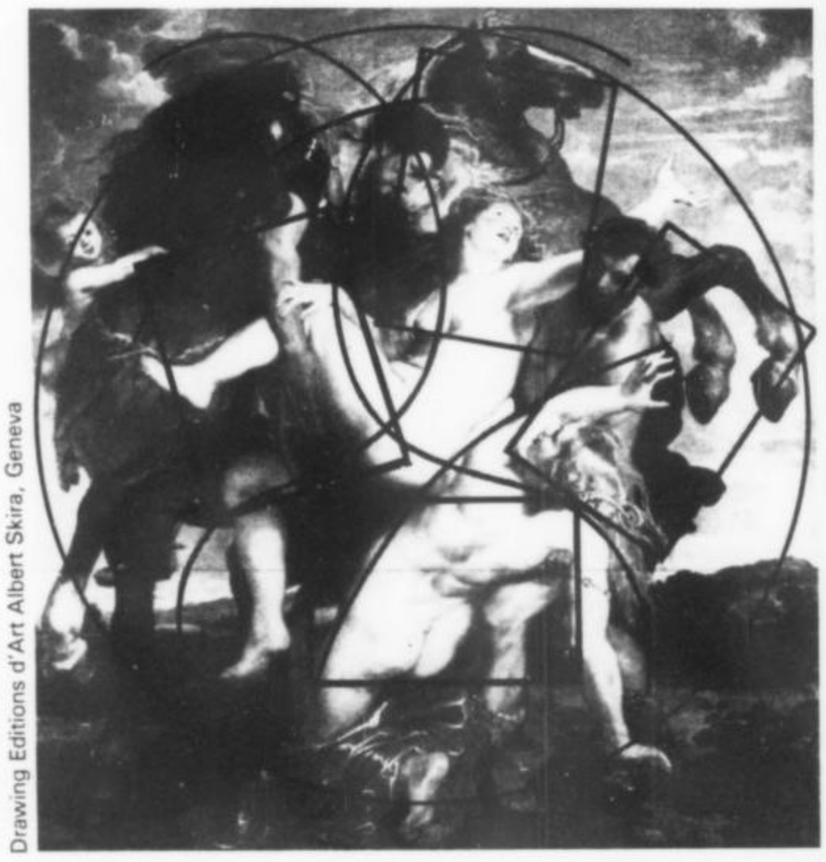
Rubens loved children and they abound in his paintings, even in such dignified works as the *Triptych of St. Ildefons,* which had been commissioned by Archduke Albert and his wife, who were portrayed on the side panels. Children appear in *The Education of the Virgin,* looking down on Hélène Fourment as the Virgin Mary, and in the *Holy Family and the Saints.*

These are the paintings of a happy man. His varied expe-

RAVISHED BEAUTIES

According to a Greek myth, Phoebe and Hilaria, daughters of King Leucippus of Messene, were snatched away from their husbands-to-be by Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Zeus. Rubens delighted in such stories, which provided him with almost inexhaustible opportunities to portray his favourite subject: the female nude. *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (2.25 m by 2.10 m), painted around 1619, is not a tragic picture: the maidens, like the impish cupid clinging to the horse's bridle at left, do not seem unduly perturbed by what is going on. Rubens has enclosed the action within a circular compositional frame (see schematic presentation above). Within the circle tensions are expressed through sweeping intersecting arcs and the scene is organized in a series of rectangles. (The size of each rectangle is determined by the "golden section", a canon of proportions which Rubens had studied intensively in Italy.) To create an atmosphere of motion and excitement, Rubens has systematically used contrasting surfaces and colours. It is remarkable that the same techniques could create such different effects as the high tragedy of *The Deposition from the Cross* (see page 7) and the "comic opera" atmosphere of the painting shown here.

Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Pinakothek, Munich



Drawing Editions d'Art Albert Skira, Geneva

riences in public life had not affected his art. When the Archduchess Isabella asked him to attend negotiations between the Estates General of the Spanish Netherlands and the United Provinces, he was confronted by a storm of protest from his countrymen, outraged by this interference in their affairs. This time, Rubens had had enough, and he bade farewell to politics.

Staging a mammoth pageant with an army of artists and craftsmen

The Archduchess died in 1633 and was succeeded as Governor General by the Cardinal-Infant Ferdinand. To celebrate his ceremonial entry into Antwerp, Rubens designed elaborate street decorations that are probably unique in the history of art.

Photo © Bulloz, Paris – Alte Pinakothek, Munich

HELL'S TORMENTS AND EARTHY DELIGHTS

The works shown on this page are characteristic of two distinct stages in the development of Rubens' art. In *The Last Judgement* (right), a great turmoil of figures hurtles down towards the middle of the picture, whence devils drag their tortured bodies to the fires of Hell. This painting, commissioned for a Bavarian church, displays Rubens' delight in depicting whirling movement, nudes in abundance and strong contrasts of light and shadow. Below, *La Kermesse,* a village carnival painted in the 1630s when Rubens was concentrating more and more on landscapes and pastoral subjects. In this scene of uninhibited revelry, harking back to the world of Bruegel the Elder, Rubens has rediscovered his roots as a Flemish painter.

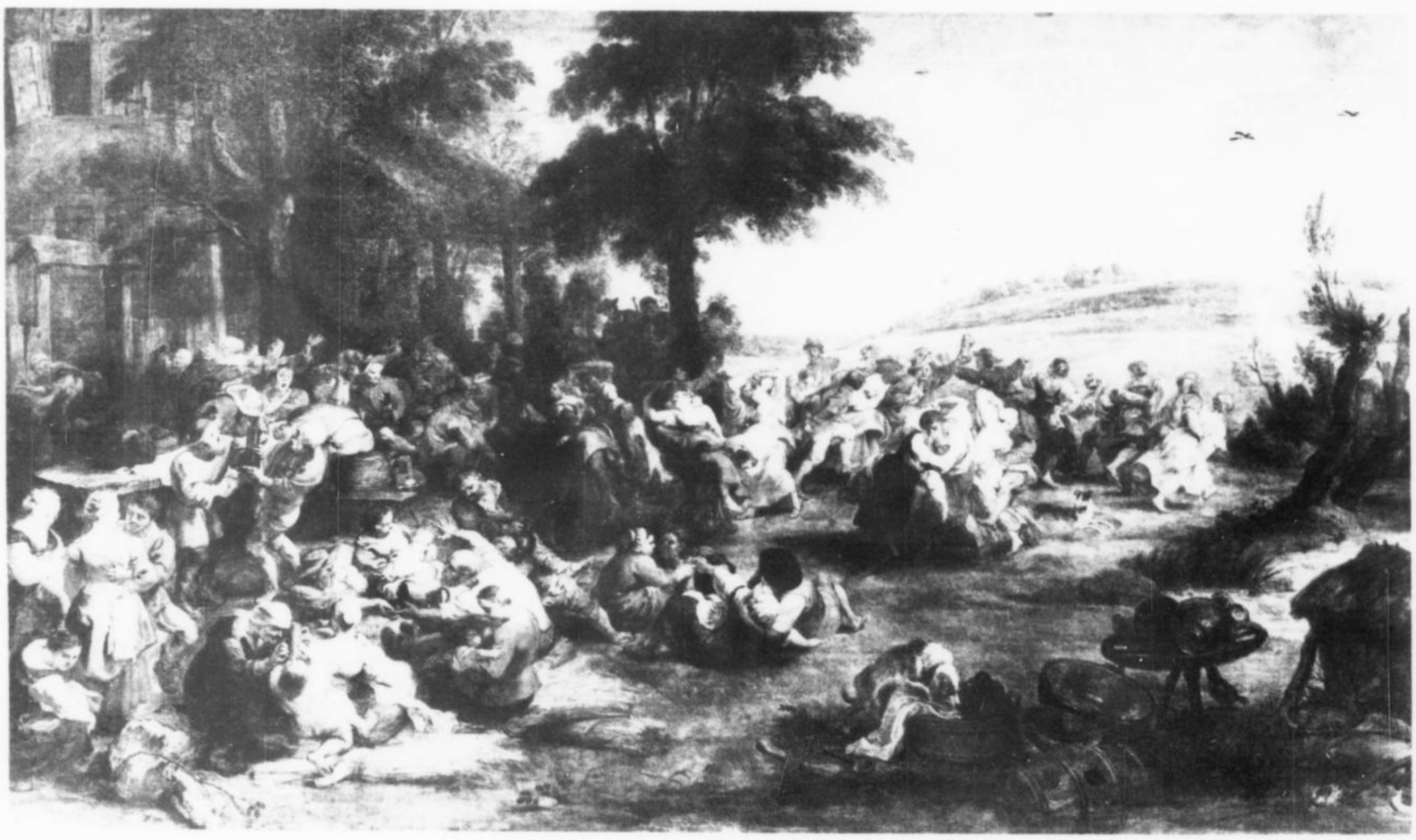


Photo © Bulloz, Paris – Louvre Museum

As architect, chief designer and impresario of this grandiose pageant, he marshalled an army of assistants. Among them were 20-odd painters, including Jacob Jordaens, Cornelis de Vos, Erasmus Quellin, Theodore Rombouts, Cornelis Schut, Theodore van Thulden, the two van Balen sons, and six sculptors, including Quellin, van Mildert and Van den Eynde.

The inscriptions were done by his friend Gevaerts, the poet and scholar. A multitude of carpenters, painters, gilders, blacksmiths, drapers, firework-makers, weavers, tinsmiths and glaziers were also engaged on the colossal undertaking, aimed at turning the whole city into an immense theatre. Floats were set up in the streets and no fewer than 11 triumphal arches were erected. The most resplendent of them was decorated on one side with 12 white stone statues of the emperors of the House of Austria, and with paintings illustrating their achievements. Decorations were everywhere and no expense was spared.

The city council wanted to raise new taxes to cover the enormous costs of this gala occasion, but higher authorities refused. However, these were mere details; the important thing was the magnificence of Rubens' achievement. Several sketches for the reception still survive, in a number of museums, notably the design for the monumental "Pompa introitus", showing sculptures and paintings by van Thulden and a text by Gevaerts.

During the same year, 1635, Rubens purchased the château of Steen at Elewyt, in Brabant, where from now until his death he would spend part of each year. Steen influenced the development of his work: he began to use its trees, and sometimes the surrounding countryside and its people, in the background of his paintings. The painter's imagination reached new heights in romantic scenes such as the *Landscape with Ulysses and Nausicaa* and the *Shipwreck of Aenaeas.* In these last years he continued to develop, applying his art to what he saw around him. In some paintings, reality mingles with the imaginary: the château serving, for example, as the backdrop to a tournament scene.

Gradually, human figures began to dwindle in importance until they became no more than tiny actors; their presence remained necessary—artistic tradition demanded it—but the landscape now dominated the entire painting. A light breeze rustles the leaves; the sky, strewn with light clouds, becomes more vast; horizons stretch out in the distance.

Gardens of love and peasant frolics

This development also influenced his choice of figures. In the lavish canvas known as *The Garden of Love,* well-dressed figures stroll, sit and flirt outdoors but still maintain an atmosphere of polite restraint. In the marvellous *Kermesse* (Carnival), painted with light, deft brush-strokes, restraint has been cast to the winds: peasants and their women dance, drink and embrace in a veritable explosion of joy. This is the work of a painter expressing himself with total freedom, in full possession of his creative powers. The time had come to discard the mask. *The Peasants' Dance* is a joyful reel, a prelude to the *Shepherd Embracing a Woman* in which Hélène Fourment's legs entwined around the legs of a man leave little to the imagination.

One last major commission arrived from Spain. Philip IV wanted a series of paintings to decorate the Torre de la Parada, his hunting lodge near Madrid. The subjects chosen, "Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Labours of Hercules", were just the kind of thing to delight the painter, providing him with endless opportunities to depict the nude.

At the same time, he continued to paint religious subjects, and his customers went on plying him with commissions. Some of his works from this late period are outstanding, especially *The Virgin with the Saints,* which he planned for his tomb, *The Road to Calvary* and *The Martyrdom of St. Livinus,* painted with breathtaking energy. His brushstrokes were growing lighter and lighter, barely skimming the canvas.

As for the dazzling nudes of his last years, many of them depicting Hélène Fourment, surely they are the best and most convincing answer to those who, glancing at his last self-portrait, have assumed that he was an unhappy husband. Nothing could have been further from the truth. His last known letter, written

CONTINUED PAGE 38

COLOUR PAGES

Opposite page: Detail from a painting by Rubens showing the artist, his young wife Hélène Fourment and one of his sons strolling in their Antwerp garden.
Photo Blauel-Pinakothek, Munich

Centre double page:
The Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria, a Genoese noblewoman. Rubens painted this portrait around 1606.
Photo © National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., U.S.A.

STAMPS TO HONOUR RUBENS

Poland

Belgium

Paraguay

Monaco

Liechtenstein

Cook Islands

Emissary of peace in strife-torn Europe

by Frans Baudouin

Opposite page above:
Rubens executed this chalk portrait of his son Nicolas around 1625-1626. He made many delightful sketches of his children and sometimes used them as models for his paintings.

Photo © Erich Lessing-Magnum
Albertina, Vienna, Austria

Opposite page below:
***Le Chapeau de Paille* (The Straw Hat) is one of Rubens' most famous and attractive portraits. It shows Susanna Fourment, sister of Rubens' second wife, wearing a wide-brimmed hat which is actually made of felt.**

Photo © Erich Lessing-Magnum,
National Gallery, London

AS a painter whose fame stretched throughout Europe, Rubens fulfilled a mass of commissions which would have exhausted a lesser man. And yet, astonishingly enough, he still found time to take part in the affairs of State. His correspondence, as well as other documents, provides ample evidence of this.

The earliest surviving letter mentioning public affairs is dated 30 September 1623, but its contents support the view that he had been concerned in secret State business long before then. However, it was through a series of fortuitous events and circumstances that he came to play an active part in diplomacy.

At that time, the Netherlands were divided into two parts. The largely Catholic south (corresponding roughly to present-day Belgium) belonged to the Spanish crown; in the north was the Republic of the United Provinces (the nucleus of today's Netherlands) which had won its independence from Spain and whose representatives met at The Hague.

For many years Spain spared no efforts to reconquer the United Provinces. However, by 1609 the Republic was so well defended under the determined leadership of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, that Spain agreed to sign a 12-year truce.

The governors of the Spanish Netherlands at this time were the Archduke Albert of Austria and his wife the Archduchess Isabella (her Spanish title was the "Serene Infanta"), whose court was at Brussels, the capital. When the truce came to an end in 1621, Jan Brant, a resident of The Hague and a nephew of Rubens' first wife, tried to make contact with the Archducal court.

A close friend of the Prince of Orange, Jan Brant was among those who had supported the truce and who were pressing for an agreement with the Spanish Netherlands. When the Prince seemed in favour of making peace, Jan Brant was eager to convey the news to the Archducal court. ▶

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Photo © National Gallery, London

Right, ***Peace and War*** **(or *Allegory on the Blessings of Peace*), painted in London in 1630, when Rubens was trying to induce Charles I to make peace with Spain. In the background, Minerva, goddess of wisdom, drives away Mars, while beneath her protection the joys of peace are displayed. A faun blissfully offers the gorgeous fruits of the earth to children and cupids, while his companions (left) are laden with gold and treasures, symbols of renewed prosperity.**

PORTRAYING THE MIGHTY

Photo © Private Collection, Switzerland

Photo © Prado Museum, Madrid

In 1625 Rubens painted this portrait (top left) of the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, governor of the Spanish Netherlands. She is wearing the habit of a nun, which she adopted after the death of her husband, the Archduke Albert, in 1621. Judging from a portrait of her in court dress which Rubens painted about 1609, the Infanta had never been beautiful: here her expression is one of authority softened by benevolence. For 25 years she was a friend, patron and protector to Rubens, who was deeply moved by her death in 1633. Top right, the first Duke of Buckingham, English politician, flamboyant adventurer and favourite of King Charles I. During his diplomatic missions, Rubens had close contacts with Buckingham, who was assassinated in 1628. Below, detail from *The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de Medici to Henry IV,* one of 21 great paintings depicting the life of Marie de Medici, the dowager queen of France. The queen commissioned this series from Rubens in 1621 for her sumptuous Paris residence, the Luxembourg Palace. Considerable imagination was needed to present the quarrelsome queen as the embodiment of all the virtues. Rubens solved the problem by clothing truth with allegory, showing the queen in glorious scenes peopled with bevies of goddesses, sirens, angels and cupids. In three years he completed the series, a masterpiece of Baroque art. Here a portrait of Marie is shown to her future husband Henry IV, who is attended by the god Mars.

Photo Bulloz, Paris — Louvre Museum, Paris

At this point Rubens expressed his willingness to act as an intermediary. As a painter, much-favoured by the Archduke and the Infanta, he had access to the Brussels court and could communicate secret information to influential people there without arousing suspicions. Rubens gave an account of his talks with Jan Brant to another of his relatives, Pierre Peck (or Peckius), Chancellor of Brabant and a trusted counsellor of the Infanta.

Rubens' first diplomatic letter was addressed to Peckius. It deals with the peace terms the artist had discussed at Antwerp with Jan Brant, who is referred to pseudonymously as "el Catolico" (the Catholic). Thus it was through two family connexions that Rubens became involved in State business as a negotiator.

From the surviving evidence, it is impossible to piece together a detailed account of the talks between Rubens and Jan Brant. Because of the highly confidential nature of the negotiations, many letters relating to them were undoubtedly destroyed by the participants. At all events, Peckius reported on them to the Infanta, who subsequently passed on the information to her nephew, Philip IV of Spain.

On 11 October 1624, the Spanish king expressed his agreement with Jan Brant's proposal that the belligerents should meet in a conference. Rubens' name is not mentioned in the letter, but we can assume that he was responsible for transmitting the "Catolico's" proposal to the Brussels court. In 1625, Rubens again refers to these negotiations, which had probably been interrupted in the meantime.

MEN, GODS AND SNARLING TIGERS

These works illustrate two of the many aspects of Rubens' art. Above, expressive and realistic studies of African heads. Below, graceful group of nymphs and gods in *The Four Parts of the World*. As in so many of Rubens' works the nudes are resplendent. In foreground, a snarling tiger suckles its young and children play with a crocodile whose gaping jaws and scaly hide make a startling contrast with the creamy skin of its human companions.

Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Musées Rovaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

In 1623, Rubens reported on his talks with Jan Brant to Peckius. Soon, however, he had an opportunity to brief the Infanta herself about them.

On 30 August 1624, the French ambassador in Brussels noted that the Infanta had granted several audiences to Rubens, who was exploring the possibilities of a truce. He also recorded that Rubens, as well as making frequent journeys between the Brussels court and the army camp of General Ambrogio Spinola, a Genoese marquis in the Infanta's service, was putting it about that the Prince of Orange was favourable towards a truce.

A letter Rubens wrote to the Infanta on 15 March 1625 provides further proof that his standing was now sufficiently high for him to approach her directly on official business.

The scope of Rubens' diplomatic activity, which had hitherto aimed at establishing peace between the two parts of the Netherlands, now became European-wide. At the beginning of 1627 he began to devote all his energies to promoting a peace treaty between Spain and England, then at war.

A chance encounter, two years before, was of decisive importance in extending Rubens' diplomatic activities to a wider European stage. While in Paris in the spring of 1625 to complete his series of paintings on the life of Marie de Medici, Rubens had made the acquaintance of George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, and his agent, Balthazar Gerbier. Buckingham was an adventurer, a connoisseur, a collector and a favourite of Charles I. Gerbier, like Rubens, was a painter and diplomat.

THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

Like many Flemish artists, Rubens loved painting animals, and gave free rein to his taste for excitement, drama and physical power in tumultuous hunting scenes depicting men and beasts locked in life-and-death combat. As well as European animals, he also portrayed lions, tigers, crocodiles and hippoes, some of which he may have seen and sketched in menageries belonging to rich noblemen. In *The Boar Hunt* (below) a boar attacked by a swarm of hounds and huntsmen is the centre of a whirlpool of action dominated by a horse's head poised dreamily above the melée. Rubens had a particular fondness for horses, often giving them expressions that are almost human. The great French painter Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) dubbed Rubens "the Homer of painting" and made a careful study of his techniques, especially his use of horses to define a painting's "lines of force". Delacroix shows something of his debt to Rubens in *The Death of Sardanapolus* (detail right).

Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Marseilles Museum, France

Photo © Bulloz, Paris—Louvre Museum

In Paris Rubens painted the Duke's portrait and thus had ample opportunity to get to know this powerful figure. This meeting in Paris undoubtedly explains why Buckingham, when he subsequently wished to conclude a peace treaty between England and Spain, called on Rubens to act as an intermediary. He dispatched Gerbier to the Netherlands to sound Rubens out.

Rubens played a key role in the ensuing negotiations. He was summoned to Madrid by Philip IV to give an account of his contacts with Buckingham. He left Antwerp in haste at the end of August 1628 and made the journey to Madrid in the remarkably short time of two weeks. Until then Philip IV, his powerful minister Olivares, and his other Counsellors, had been sceptical about the negotiations in which Rubens was engaged. Now they were impressed by the positive results of the talks and by the soundness of Rubens' reasoning.

Rubens' stay in Madrid lasted about eight months, ending on 29 April 1629, when he set out for London on a mission entrusted to him by Philip IV. He called at Brussels on the way to meet the Infanta, and paid a brief visit to Antwerp to see his two sons.

In London, Rubens encountered many obstacles but finally succeeded in preparing the ground for a peace treaty between England and Spain. His acuteness in assessing men and situations, his powers of persuasion, his skill and tact certainly made a major contribution to the outcome, as well as his reputation as a great painter, for both Charles I and Philip IV of Spain loved the arts and were delighted by the presence of Rubens at their courts.

For Charles I he painted an *Allegory on the Blessings of Peace* (National Gallery, London) in which Minerva, goddess of peace, drives away Mars, god of war. This was clearly an allusion to the negotiations which Rubens had carried on with Charles I and which led to the peace treaty between Spain and England.

Rubens' mission to London was undoubtedly the high point of his diplomatic career. Madrid was highly satisfied with his work in London. There was question of entrusting him with other missions. But the artist, who had spent so many years travelling, now wished to live a peaceful family life in Antwerp with his young wife, Hélène Fourment, whom he married on 6 December 1630. He wished once more to devote himself entirely to his art.

"For my part, I should like the whole world to be at peace and that we should live in a century of gold and not of iron," Rubens wrote. It is not only in his paintings that we can see the glimmering dawn of a "century of gold."

■ **Frans Baudouin**

Rubens' skill in creating a luminous quality when depicting human flesh has been admired (and envied) by many artists. A great modern painter of the female nude, Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), once ruefully confessed that he needed to use heavily applied paint to produce effects which Rubens achieved with the lightest of brushstrokes. Nevertheless, Renoir's *Mother and Child* (right) strikes the same warm, intimate note as Rubens' *Portrait of Hélène Fourment and her Children* (detail below). See also colour reproduction, page 19.

Photo © Bulloz, Paris — Durand Ruel Collection

Photo © Bulloz, Paris — Louvre Museum

VENUS GOES POP

Rubens borrowed the subject of *The Toilet of Venus* (below left), executed between 1612 and 1615, from the great Venetian Master, Titian (1477-1547). In the 1960s the painting was given a "pop art" treatment when the American artist Robert Rauschenberg used it in a work entitled *Persimmone*.

Photo © Liechtenstein Collection, Vaduz

Photo © Usis, Paris

SPINOZA

PHILOSOPHER OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

by Ben Rekers

THREE hundred years ago, on 21 February 1677, Benedict de Spinoza, the great seventeenth-century forerunner of modern agnostic thought, died at The Hague.

The contents of his desk, containing his last writings, were in accordance with his wishes taken that very evening to Amsterdam, where the bookseller Jan Rieuwertsz made an immediate start on the printing of the *Opera Posthuma* (Posthumous Works).

Within a few months a translator, Jan Glazemaker, had produced a Dutch version of these works so as to render their contents accessible to those who did not know Latin.

In 1632, when Spinoza was born in Amsterdam, the country was enjoying a period of tolerance and great prosperity. The latter, resulting from successful trading with the Dutch overseas colonies, had its focus in the *Beurs* or stock exchange of Amsterdam.

Power in this city was in the hands of the burgomasters, an oligarchy drawn from a small circle of patrician families. The religious tolerance of Amsterdam's cosmopolitan citizens sprang from their tradesman's mentality—one does not, after all, question the religion of people to whom one is trying to sell something.

During the first 15 years of his life Spinoza had little or no contact with the Dutch. Even though its members enjoyed the rights of citizenship, the Jewish community, to which Spinoza's family belonged, lived in isolation in its own quarter of the city.

Spinoza spoke Portuguese at home and at school (1). His father ran a highly successful business trading in products from the Levant. From the age of five, Spinoza attended a Jewish school where he learned excellent Hebrew and scripture.

When aged about 14, he left the school in order to help in his father's business, and after the latter's early death Spinoza ran the business for some years on his own. He probably had little talent for commerce, but it is known that he was delighted to leave school.

At the Amsterdam stock exchange he made the acquaintance of other young merchants like himself, such as Jarig Jelles, Pieter Balling and Simon de Vries, all of whom were Collegiants (2). Their piety reflected the simplicity and austerity of the early Christians and they professed a religion with pronounced spiritualist leanings.

The young Spinoza, who was himself sober and serious-minded by nature, was attracted to them, and they were to remain his closest friends throughout his life. Their ways of thinking were more sympathetic to him than those of the capitalist-minded Jewish milieu.

Around this time Spinoza also met Francis van den Enden, an ex-Jesuit from Flanders who was now married and living in Amsterdam. He had opened an excellent Latin school there, where the sons of rich merchants could be prepared for their studies at the University of Leiden.

Spinoza went there to learn Latin, with the particular purpose of acquainting himself with contemporary European science. He then began to read Giordano Bruno, Bacon, Hobbes, Machiavelli and, most important of all, Descartes, who had become famous in the Netherlands when his first works were published in 1637, and for whom there was a veritable passion at Leiden University.

Van den Enden introduced Spinoza to the philosophy of scepticism, of which he was himself an advocate, and in return Spinoza gave lessons in Hebrew grammar to the school's pupils, who included the young intellectuals Lodewijk Meijer and Adriaan Koerbagh, with whom he became great friends.

Their names occur in his correspondence right up to the end of his life, and it was they who eventually persuaded him to put his ideas down on paper. They were actively involved in publishing his work and drew on Spinoza's philosophy in their own writings.

As a result of this contact with liberal Dutch intellectuals, Spinoza became increasingly estranged from the milieu of his birth. However, the leaders of the Jewish community, who would have been glad to have had such a brilliant young man to their credit, tried to win him over, even going so far as to offer him a thousand florins in return for his silence.

But in his discussions with the rabbis, Spinoza refused to change his ideas, persisting in them with, if anything, greater vehemence.

By 1656, when Spinoza was 24, the synagogue had had enough and proceeded to excommunicate him. He was cursed to future generations, and no Jew was allowed to have anything to do with him or even approach him closer than ten paces.

History is, however, guilty of a certain misinterpretation, or at any rate misunderstanding, with respect to the much-quoted text of Spinoza's excommunication. Less well-known than the actual text is the fact that such bans were a frequent occurrence in Jewish communities, often being rescinded after as little as a week.

In any case Spinoza seems to have been totally unconcerned by the event, and did not even bother to defend himself or take any steps to have the excommunication withdrawn. His choice had been made

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BEN REKERS, *Dutch university teacher, is an assistant professor at the University of Utrecht. His stud, on Arias Montano, the 16th-century Spanish Orientalist who directed the translation of the Antwerp polyglot Bible (see page 12) has been published in English as* Benito Arias Montano 1527-1598 *(The Warburg Institute, London, 1972).*

(1) Like many of its neighbours, Spinoza's family was descended from immigrants of Iberian origin who had fled the Inquisition.

(2) The collegiants constituted an important movement of religious dissidence in Dutch Protestantism. From 1620 onwards they set up "colleges" which met in the village of Rijnsburg near Leiden, where they underwent rebaptism by immersion. They respected all religious beliefs since they felt that no denomination could claim a monopoly of the truth. They did not recognize any religious services or dogmas, and attached more importance to love of their fellow beings than to love of God.

Photo © Giraudon, Paris – Wolfenbuttel Library, The Netherlands

Portrait of Spinoza by an anonymous 17th-century Dutch painter

voluntarily. His new circle of friends was like a family, with the advantage that they thought as he did.

Spinoza's separation from the Jewish community meant that he could no longer carry on his business, so he learned to grind lenses in order to make a living.

There was a great interest in experimental natural science at this time, especially microscopy and astronomy. Through the work of Descartes, Spinoza had already come into contact with the investigations being made in the Netherlands by the young Christiaan Huyghens, van Leeuwenhoek (see article page 34) and Swammerdam, and he knew of the experiments being carried out by Newton and Boyle in England. He felt that his occupation had a promising future.

For another four years Spinoza continued to live in Amsterdam, until the fanatical rabbis managed to persuade the city council to declare him *persona non grata.* After this he spent some months at the summer residence of a rich friend in Ouderkerk, 15 kilometres away from his Amsterdam friends, who were thus able to pay him regular visits.

In the mid-17th century Amsterdam was referred to by foreigners as Irenopolis (city of peace) or Eleutheropolis (city of freedom). The city opened its doors freely to all those who were undergoing religious persecution elsewhere in Europe: Spanish Jews, French Huguenots and Socinians from Poland could speak, write and publish there unmolested.

The city council, by reason of its businessman's mentality, was tolerant, for prosperous trade was irreconcilable with fanatical idealism. Anyone who had expertise or good trade contacts to offer was welcome and of potential use to the economy.

During his Amsterdam period, Spinoza learned to value highly the climate of freedom which reigned in the city, and later sang its praises in the following splendid passage:... "the city of Amsterdam, whose enjoyment of this freedom had made it great and admired by the whole world. In this flourishing state, this city without a peer, men of every race and sect live in the greatest harmony, and before they entrust their goods to anyone, there are only two things they want to know : whether he is rich or poor, and whether he is honest or dishonest. His religion or sect does not matter, for it has no influence on the decision of lawsuits. And no sect whatsoever is so detested that its members (provided that they harm no one, give every man his own, and live decent lives) are refused the protection of the civil authorities." (3)

In 1660 Spinoza moved to Rijnsburg, where he knew he would find an atmosphere of peace and seclusion in the company of the Collegiants. He lived in the village in a small house for three years, making optical instruments, reading and above all writing.

He corresponded frequently with Heinrich Oldenburg of the Royal Society in London on the subjects of refraction and Boyle's experimental physics, and received regular letters containing questions from his Amsterdam friends Meijer, Balling and de Vries.

(3) From chapter 20 of the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, 1670, translated by A.G. Wernham in Spinoza's Political Works, (Oxford 1958).

Two scenes of life in Amsterdam in Spinoza's time. Below right, the Stock Exchange, where the tolerant and enlightened Dutch merchants met not only to talk business but to discuss the latest ideas. In the 1650s, when Spinoza worked for his father, a prosperous merchant, his duties often took him to the Stock Exchange. It was there that he met and befriended a group of young Protestants belonging to the "Collegiant" movement (so named because its members were organized in small congregations or "colleges"). Below, an assembly of Collegiants, who, like the young Spinoza, were critical of existing social and religious institutions.

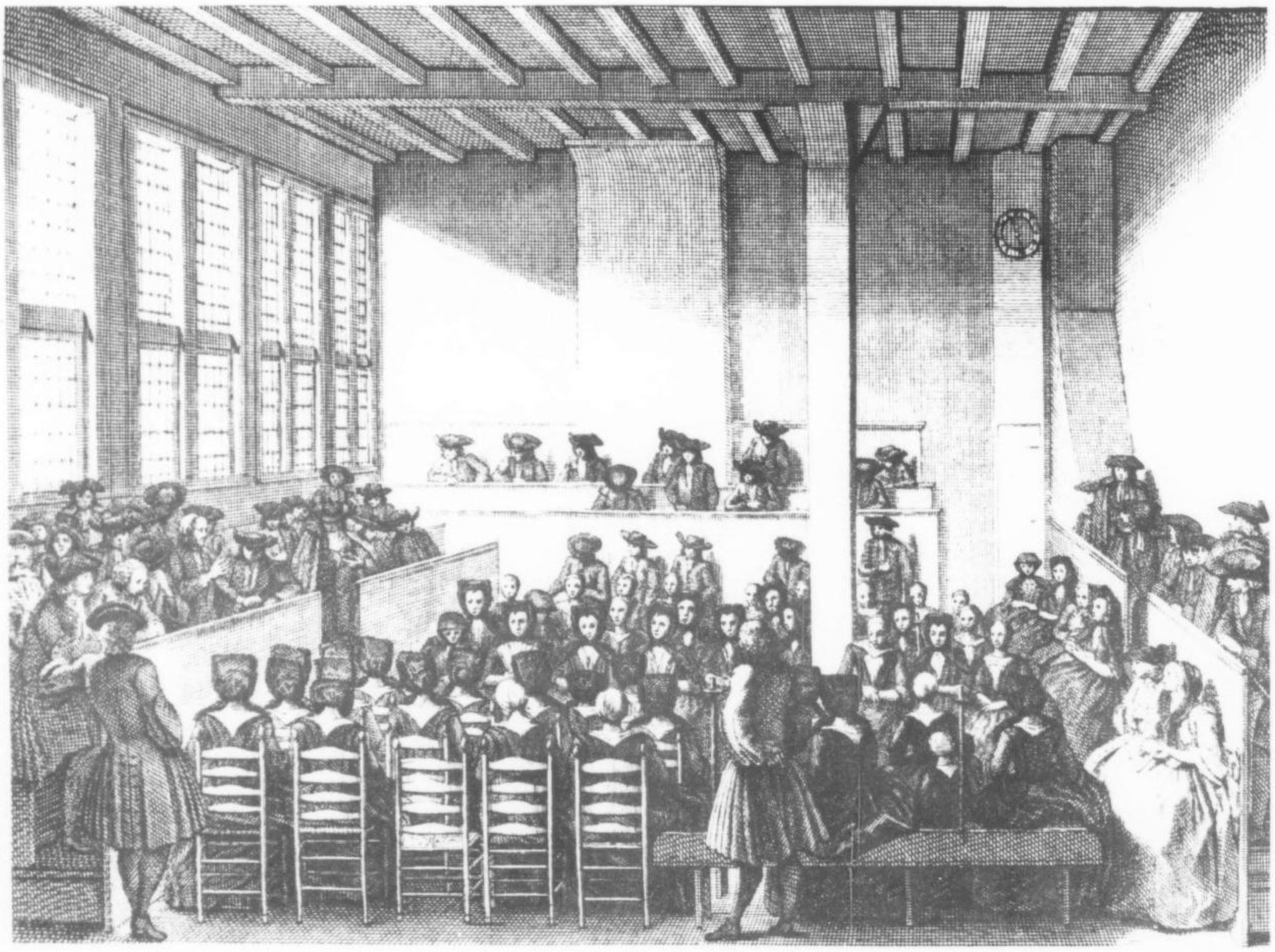


Photo © Mennonite Community, Amsterdam

They had formed a discussion group which met weekly in Jan Rieuwertsz' bookshop, the centre for freethinkers. Spinoza also received visits from statesmen and scholars such as Burgomaster Hudde, who ordered lenses from him, and probably from the well-known diplomat van Beuningen, a Collegiant who came to Rijnsburg every year for a retreat.

Another visitor was the powerful Grand Pensionary Jan de Witt, who was a mathematician by training and the author of a well-known mathematical treatise, *De Linearum Curvarum.*

A student from Leiden by the name of Casearius paid regular visits to Spinoza in order to have the work of Descartes explained to him. As a result, a collection of notes came into being which were also read by the members of the discussion group in Amsterdam, who urged Spinoza to have them published.

He agreed, and the notes became his first work to appear in print, entitled "Principles of the Cartesian Philosophy together with Metaphysical Thoughts".

His friend Lodewijk Meijer, the doctor and philologist, wrote a preface to the book. The corn-chandler Jarich Jelles, who in the meantime had sold his business in order to devote himself to philosophy, financed the printing.

Jelles did not know Latin, and considered that at his age it would be a waste of time to learn it, and so he paid for a translation of the book into Dutch, which was undertaken by Jan Glazemaker. This and subsequent translations were of considerable importance in making Spinoza's philosophy known to a wider public at an early stage.

During this period Spinoza began to formulate his own philosophical system, in the first version of his *Ethics,* in which he moved right away from Descartes. Passages of this began to circulate in manuscript form and were read and commented on with eager enthusiasm by his friends.

Their admiration was so great that the merchant Simon de Vries, a bachelor, named Spinoza as his sole heir, although the philosopher, whose way of life was still modest and frugal, only accepted an annuity of 300 florins. Without a doubt the generous offers of help to Spinoza and the interest taken in his ideas from an early stage were invaluable to his work.

At this point a gradual change began to form in Spinoza's attitude to life. He felt that he could no longer allow himself to share in the Spiritualists' lack of political commitment. His thoughts had been turned in this direction by reading Pierre de la Court's *Maximes Politiques pour les États de Hollande,* which defended a form of liberal republicanism. According to de la Court the system of government was determined by economic freedom, and political and religious freedom were closely linked. The church should not be allowed to dominate the State.

Spinoza now abandoned isolation and abstract thought in order to give active support, through his writing, to the liberal politics of Jan de Witt. He moved to Voorburg on the outskirts of The Hague so as to keep in closer touch with his friends in the government.

During this period he wrote his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* which contained

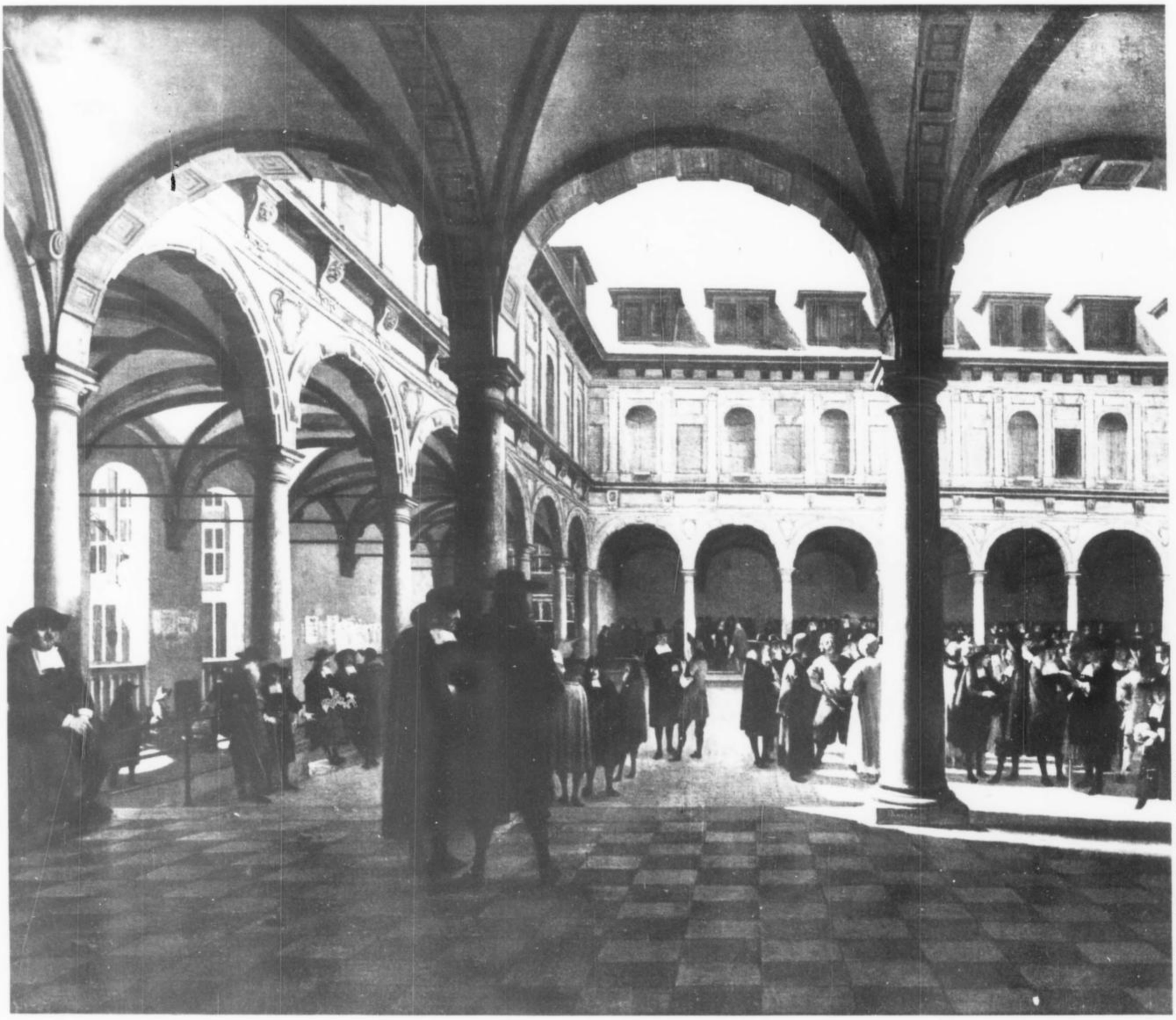


Photo : Bulloz, Paris - Amsterdam City Archives

Photo © University Library, Amsterdam

a fierce attack on the so-called "theocratic" Calvinist mode of government, and on the greed for power of the clergy, who pandered to popular feeling.

Spinoza categorized military patriotism as one of the basest human passions. He thought that the most suitable form of government for the country would be the rule of an oligarchy composed of a small intellectual élite drawn from the upper merchant classes.

In the theological part of the *Tractatus* he pointed out that the Bible was only the work of man, and had been used time and time again to enslave the people. Spinoza also indicated various chronological inaccuracies in the Bible.

The work was published in 1670, the author's name only being indicated by the initials B.D.S.

During this period, Jan de Witt's political power began to wane. A rationalist politician, he had never curried favour with the mass of the people, and now he was making mistakes, particularly in his foreign policy towards England.

In 1672 he was suddenly faced with a joint attack by the French army of Louis XIV and the English fleet. This year of invasion became known in Dutch history as the *Rampjaar* or year of disaster. De Witt's fall is partly attributed to his refusal, during his period in power, to allocate sufficient funds for Dutch military forces. This decided his fate: he was lynched by the mob at The Hague.

When Spinoza, normally so disciplined in his emotions, heard of his friend and kindred spirit's brutal murder he was overcome with rage. He wanted to go out in the street to challenge the hateful mob, and was only dissuaded from doing so with the greatest difficulty. That night he wrote a short pamphlet, *Ultimi Barbarorum* (the very lowest of the barbarians), which he posted near the place of the assassination.

In the same year, the young Prince William III of Orange was appointed Stadtholder and Captain-General of the Army. He was already much liked by the people, as a "child of the state". Admiral de Ruyter was able to make his mark on the English fleet; and so the disaster-ridden nation was saved.

On the home front, however, a period of repression was under way. University professors who had been won over to scepticism were dismissed and censorship was reintroduced. The city councils, which for years had ignored the condemnations of the Calvinist synods, were purged. Military patriotism had prevailed.

Spinoza now belonged to the ranks of the persecuted, whose spokesman he had been in his writings. His *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was banned: it is thought, though not known for certain, that it had been commissioned by Jan de Witt. In any case it was denounced by the censorship as a work "forged in hell by a renegade Jew and the devil, and issued with the knowledge of Mr Jan de Witt"

Spinoza's subsequent fear, especially in a man of such natural caution, is understandable, particularly in view of the fate of his disciple Adriaan Koerbagh. After writing a Spinozist work, *A Light Shining in Darkness,* Koerbagh had in 1668 been imprisoned and tortured, and had died in gaol.

In addition, Spinoza had learned that his former teacher van den Enden, who had gone to France, had been beheaded in 1674 for his involvement in the republican plot of the Chevalier de Rohan against Louis XIV.

During the remaining five years of his life Spinoza lived in a rented room in The Hague, secluded and disillusioned, working on a new *Political Treatise* and completing his *Ethics.* He received a number of important visitors, particularly from abroad where his reputation was already high, such as a representative of the Prince de Condé, the French general, and also the young Leibniz, St-Evremont, and the Elector Palatine, who offered him a chair at the University of Heidelberg.

He refused the offer because of his desire to complete his life's work in peace and isolation, and almost achieved his wish. Unfortunately he left his *Political Treatise* unfinished, in the chapter where after discoursing on the subject of monarchy and oligarchy, he had intended to deal with the advantages and disadvantages of democracy.

Spinoza died of tuberculosis at the early age of 45. Right to the end of his life, he applied himself to his writings and correspondence, often working at night. Towards the end a doctor friend from Amsterdam stayed with him, and afterwards took the manuscript of the *Ethics* back with him to van Rieuwertsz, the publisher.

The philosopher was buried in the Nieuwe Kerk (new church) at The Hague, and his hearse was accompanied by six carriages occupied by important admirers whose names have not come down to us. The house on the Prinsessegracht where he spent his last years has recently been restored and opened as a museum.

As we have seen, even during Spinoza's lifetime he had followers who saw in his thought the ultimate truth and who, often grossly simplifying his philosophy, made extreme and radical deductions from it in their own writings.

These followers included Lodewijk Meijer

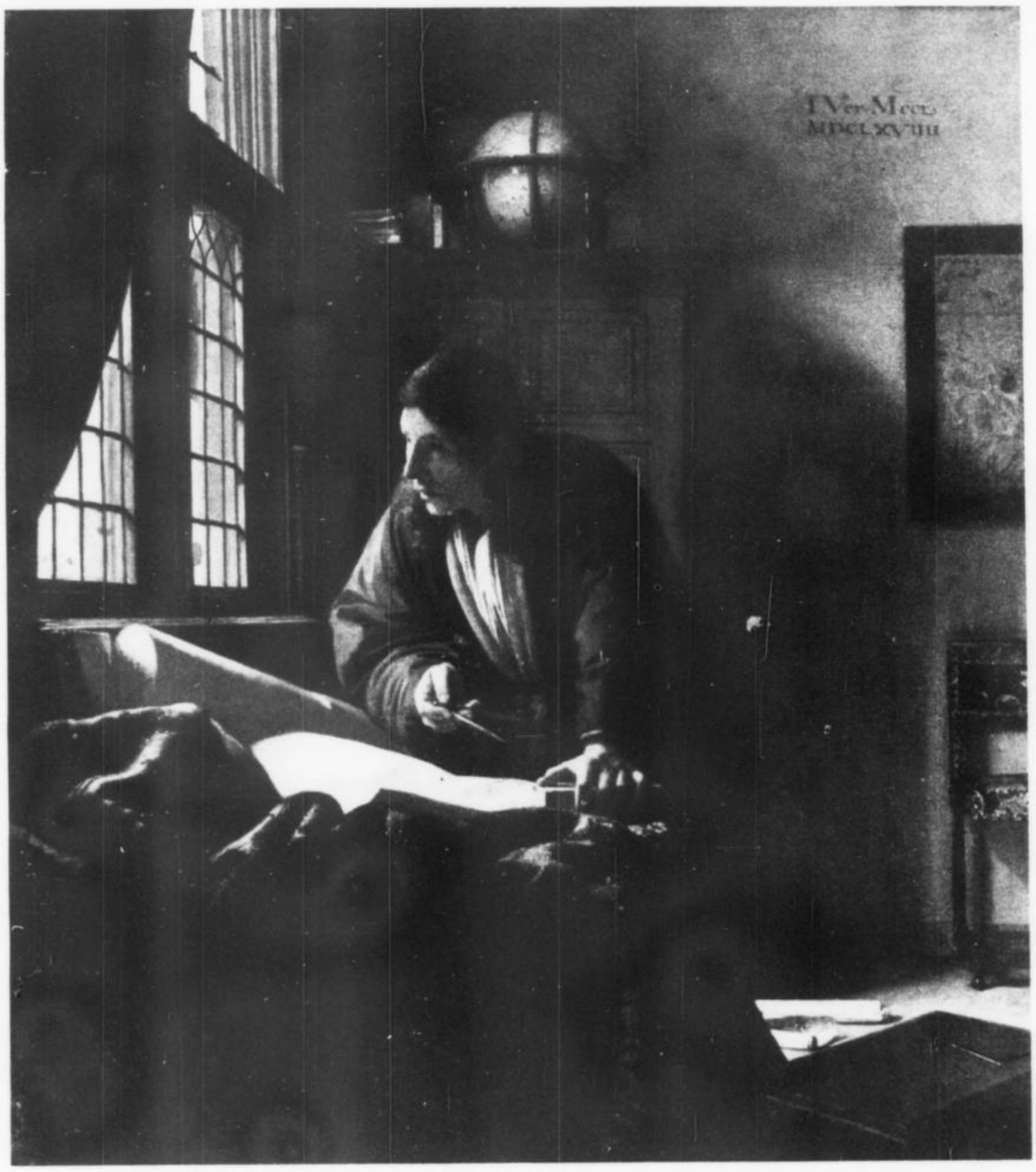


Photo © Kunstinstituts, Frankfurt

Opposite page: 17th-century engraving of a district of Amsterdam. The Dutch voyages of discovery and the founding of the Dutch East India Company in the early 17th century made Amsterdam the world's major commercial city, and its policy of religious toleration attracted waves of Jewish refugees from Spain and the Spanish Netherlands as well as Protestants from many countries. Left, *The Geographer* (1658) a work by one of the great Masters of Dutch painting, Jan Vermeer of Delft, who, like Spinoza, was born in 1632. He died in 1675.

in his *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* ("Philosophical Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures")—an eloquent title—and also spiritualist believers such as Pieter Balling ("The Light on the Candlestick") who modified his philosophy into a vague mysticism, and Jarich Jelles, who in his "Profession of the Christian Faith" presented Spinoza as a kind of evangelist.

These spiritual free-thinkers were of great value to Spinoza when it was a question of giving him practical help, but they were somewhat naïve and only had a partial grasp of his metaphysics, which are far more complex than those of Descartes.

Shortly after Spinoza's death, a minister from the town of Zwolle, F. van Leenhof, wrote "Heaven on Earth", an epicurean work in which he drew on Spinoza's work to advocate free sexual morals. He was given a savage sentence in 1712 after a long trial.

The orthodox Calvinists had been right in realizing early on that Spinoza's philosophical system contained dynamite. It is difficult to be sure whether Spinoza was essentially an atheist in his *Ethics,* as modern interpretations of his work are greatly at variance.

What is certain is that his pantheism *(Deus sive Natura),* his lay rationalism and his philosophical free-thinking prepared the way for the crisis of the European conscience and the Age of the Enlightenment. Later on Schelling, Goethe, Schleiermacher and Hegel were to build on his foundations, and in 19th-century France his influence on Victor Cousin, Paul Janet and Ernest Renan was considerable. Einstein in the 20th century was an admirer of his work.

Many of Spinoza's biographers have painted a highly sentimentalized picture of him as a poor spectacle-maker who lived his life in poverty and obscurity. The truth is that, along with Huyghens, he was one of the most famous experts in optics of his day.

He is often depicted as a dreamy abstract thinker living in seclusion, whereas he numbered many influential politicians among his friends and acquaintances. Finally, his often-cited excommunication by the Jewish authorities was a frequent and relatively insignificant occurrence at the time.

Recent historical research, in some cases undertaken on the occasion of the tricentenary of Spinoza's death, has set out to expose a number of legends concerning his life and to distinguish fact from fiction.

Nevertheless, there are still some gaps in Spinoza's biography. Evidence dating back to the 17th century, apart from the biased and unreliable entry in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary,* is confined to descriptions of him by his contemporaries Lucas and Colerus. They did not know him personally, and were obliged to rely on information given them by the painter from whom Spinoza rented a room. There are many discrepancies in the works of these early biographers.

The surviving correspondence to and from Spinoza is scant, consisting of a mere 84 letters whose texts are often incomplete. Personal news was regarded by early scholars as unimportant and was cut out, so that most of the letters read more like treatises on philosophy or natural science.

Even so, they provide much useful clarification of the *Ethics* and also illustrate Spinoza's kindliness, revealing the patience with which he explained his ideas to the often simple people who wanted to understand his work.

Spinoza was a highly original thinker who evolved his philosophical system quite independently. Yet it should not be forgotten that he was able to work so successfully partly because he lived in one of the freest nations in Europe, where the intellectual climate was salutary and stimulating and where he was able to find a circle of friends who could support him morally and financially.

One might even wonder whether this modest and cautious man would ever have committed his thoughts to paper, let alone published them, had it not been for the pressure exerted by these friends.

■ **Ben Rekers**

VAN LEEUWENHOEK

FATHER OF MICROBIOLOGY

by J.W.M. La Rivière

Portrait of Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) by J. Verkolje

Photo © Gabb Collection, London

Some 300 years ago—in the 1670s—a vast new world was uncovered by the ingenuity and perseverance of a self-made scholar living in the city of Delft, the Netherlands. The scholar's name was Antonie van Leeuwenhoek.

He did not sail uncharted oceans, nor did he cross inhospitable mountains and deserts. He made his discoveries quietly at home looking at a candle, armed with a tiny hand-microscope.

The candle served as a light source for the illumination of a great variety of objects ranging from a drop of blood to the wing of a butterfly. These he studied with his home-made instrument about the size of a matchbox, which nevertheless gave a magnification of some 270 times with a single lens.

Having started his career as a draper, van Leeuwenhoek had been counting the threads of his wares with a magnifying glass. Gradually he became so fascinated by microscopy that he devoted more and more time to perfecting his lenses and bringing them to bear on everything he could put his hands on.

Thus he turned from a small businessman into one of the world's great naturalists, earning what money he needed through several jobs in the service of the town of Delft.

He recorded his observations in great detail and with passionate objectivity in his famous letters to the Royal Society in London; the Society eventually elected him a Fellow in 1680.

His collected letters are now being published by the Royal Academy of Sciences of the Netherlands in both Dutch and English, illustrated with his drawings, and annotated in the light of present knowledge. More than 20 thick volumes are foreseen.

Even today his reports are a delight to read. On the one hand he leaned over backwards to remain factual and to refrain from unwarranted interpretations and speculations, providing ingenious quantitative measurements wherever he could. On the other hand he could not always restrain himself, a human being possessed as he was by the elation engendered by marvels freshly discovered.

On such occasions he let himself go, giving vent to his excitement, an excitement easily shared by biologists peering through their microscopes today.

Describing, for instance, his observations on what we now call bacteria in infusions of pepper in water, he wrote (1676) .

"In the afternoon of the same day, about 3 o'clock, I saw still more animalcules, both round ones and those that were twice as long as broad, and besides these, a sort

JAN WILLEM MAURITS LA RIVIERE *is professor of environmental microbiology at the International Institute for Hydraulic and Environmental Engineering, Delft, the Netherlands. He is chairman of the International Cell Research Organization (ICRO), of the International Commission on Microbial Ecology and of the natural sciences subcommission of the Netherlands National Commission for Unesco.*

which were still smaller, and incredibly many of the very little animalcules whose shape I could not make out this morning. I now saw very distinctly that these were little eels or worms..., lying huddled together and wriggling, just as if you saw with your naked eye a whole tubful of very little eels and water, the eels moving about in swarms; and the whole water seemed to be alive with the multitudinous animalcules.

"For me this was among all the marvels that I have discovered in nature the most marvellous of all, and I must say that, for my part, no more pleasant sight has yet met my eye than this of so many thousands of living creatures in one small drop of water, all huddling and moving, but each creature having its own motion. And even if I said that there were a hundred thousand animalcules in one drop of water which I took from the surface of the water, I should not err."

And in his letter (1693) on the anatomy of the flea he recorded the following exclamation of his draughtsman: "Dear God, what marvels there are in so small a creature."

Because he also observed and described many other kinds of microbes such as algae, protozoa and yeasts, van Leeuwenhoek became perhaps best known as the Father of Microbiology. Nevertheless we should not forget that he made many more pioneering discoveries in other branches of biology as well, including:

- the spermatozoids of man (1677); the circulation of the blood in arteries; the structure of hair, teeth and bone; the components of blood, milk and sputum;
- the structure of wood and many other plant tissues;
- the anatomy of insects, worms and many other animals.

Through his work in botany, anatomy, histology, entomology, physiology, as well as that in microbiology, van Leeuwenhoek became a universal forerunner in the life sciences, a field of intensive activity for Unesco too, in which the Organization closely collaborates with the International Cell Research Organization (ICRO), founded exactly 15 years ago.

A major segment of this programme is carried out jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is directed towards the application of microbiology to the basic human needs in the developing countries, especially rural areas.

Most microbes—less than one-tenth of a percent of them can cause disease—are ▶

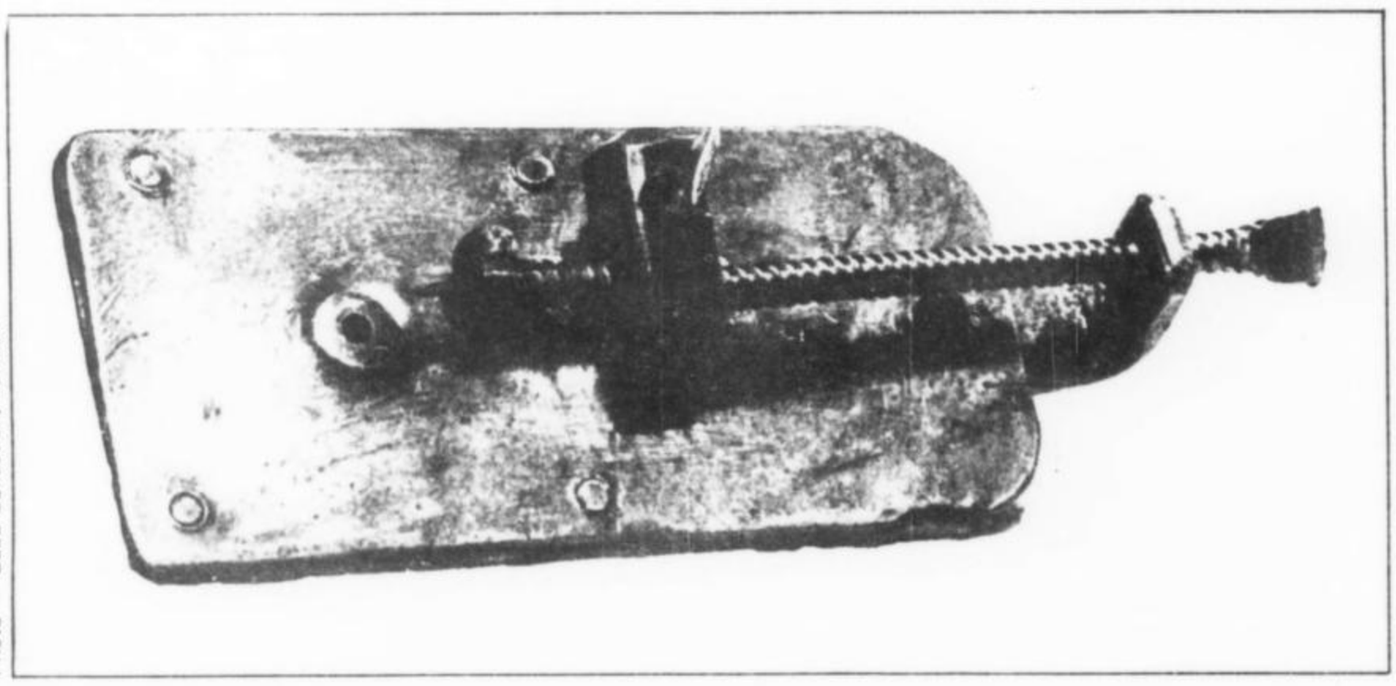


Photo © Gabb Collection, London

PIONEER EXPLORATION OF THE MICROBE WORLD

Above, a brass microscope, one of 500 made and used by Antonie van Leeuwenhoek between 1673 and 1723 in his pioneering studies of microbes. The tiny lens was mounted between two metal plates (approx. 40 mm by 18 mm) riveted together. Objects to be viewed were mounted on a needle and brought into focus by adjusting the screw which moved the specimen in front of the lens. On 15 April 1977 a replica of a van Leeuwenhoek microscope was presented to Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of Unesco by the Netherlands National Commission for Unesco in recognition of Unesco's activities in the life sciences. Below left, van Leeuwenhoek's drawings of bacteria from the human mouth. Fig. A is a drawing of a motile *Bacillus*. Below right, cell of a motile *Bacillus* seen through a powerful modern electron microscope.

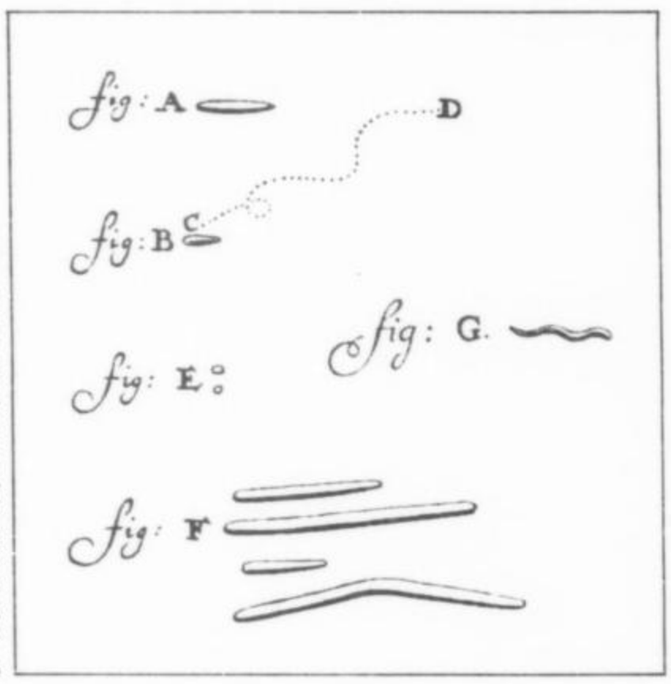


Photo © Government Museum for the History of Natural Science, Leiden, the Netherlands

In a famous letter to the Royal Society in London, written in 1683, van Leeuwenhoek vividly described the above bacteria and their movements: A, he wrote "had a strong and nimble motion and shot through the water like a pike"; B "often spin about like a top and sometimes took a course as shown between C and D"; E "went ahead so nimbly... that I can compare them to nothing better than a swarm of gnats or flies"; F were "streaks or threads... which lay disorderly ravelled together"; and G "bent themselves in curves as they moved."

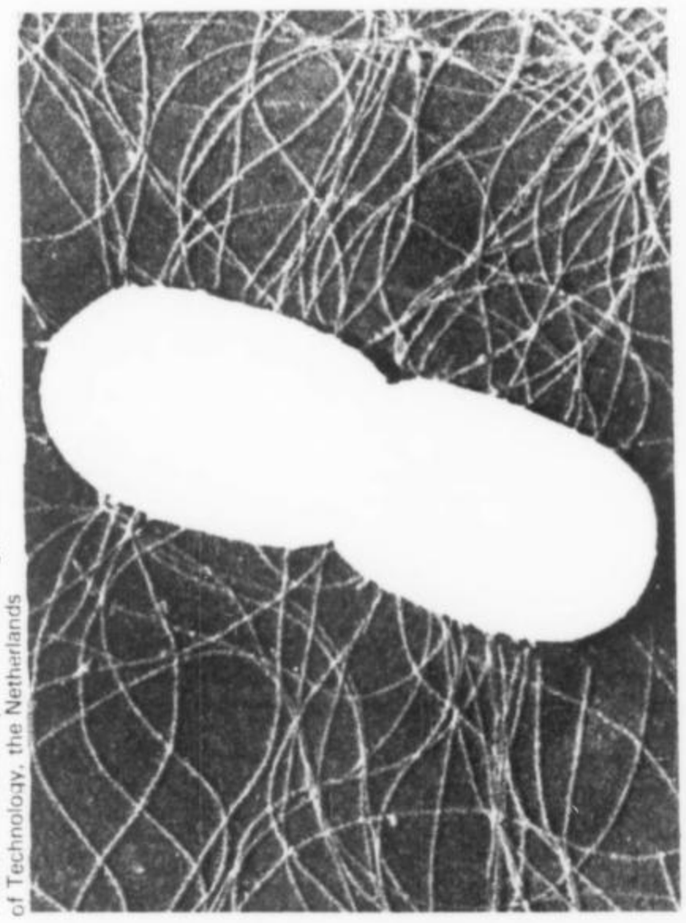


Photo © Laboratory of Microbiology, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

beneficial and eminently suited to serve as tools in the production of food, fodder, fuel and fertilizer, in the recycling of waste materials and in the production of chemicals like antibiotics (see *Unesco Courier,* July 1975). These are the areas on which the UNEP-Unesco-ICRO programme of applied microbiology concentrates its activities.

But there is one more good reason why Unesco should join in the celebrations of the tercentenary of van Leeuwenhoek's discoveries. At a time when Europe was seething with conflict, van Leeuwenhoek quietly conducted his correspondence with the Royal Society in London across the barriers of the war between England and the Netherlands (1672-1674).

This is spelled out in the letter through which Reinier de Graaf, an anatomist from Delft, introduced van Leeuwenhoek to the Royal Society in 1673: "That it may be the more evident to you that the humanities and science are not yet banished from among us by the clash of arms, I am writing to tell you that a certain most ingenious person here, named Leeuwenhoeck, has devised microscopes which far surpass those which we have hitherto seen... The enclosed letter from him, wherein he describes certain things which he has observed more accurately than previous authors, will afford you a sample of his work...."

The letters in which van Leeuwenhoek communicated his discoveries to the Royal Society 300 years ago manifest the universality and pervasiveness of scientific endeavour among the nations of the world, spiritual foundations upon which Unesco also depends.

■ **J.W.M. La Rivière**

RUBENS *(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18)*

less than two months before his death, provides ample proof to the contrary. And his work, it must be repeated, is that of a contented man.

Rubens died in Antwerp on 3 May 1640. He had been the crowning glory of the Antwerp school, which virtually died out with him. Van Dyck followed him to the grave in 1641, although Jordaens, the Antwerp school's last representative of note, survived until 1678. After that, the school went into a more or less final decline. However, Rubens' work continued to exercise great influence, especially on French artists, from Watteau, Boucher and Fragonard, to Delacroix, and even Renoir.

Rubens, a fascinating and many-sided personality, loved corresponding with the great men of his time, especially with humanists such as Fabri de Peiresc, the famous Provençal scholar who, right up to his death in 1637, lost no opportunity to show his admiration for the painter.

As a result of his formative years in Italy, Rubens was most at ease when writing in Italian, which he used whether communicating with Spanish grandees such as the Archduke and his wife, or Count-Duke Olivares, or with his French scholar friends. Sometimes he wrote in French—to Buckingham among others—or in Flemish, to some of his colleagues. His letters contain a liberal sprinkling of Latin phrases.

His prodigious capacity for work enabled him to amass an impressive fortune, despite the hard times in which he lived. He was tireless in defending his own interests. For example, he was greatly interested in engraving, realizing that the circulation of prints was an excellent means of getting his work widely known. In addition to obtaining privileges for the distribution of his works in several countries, he made a close study of engraving techniques, even giving impetus to a new school of engraving, differing from earlier schools in its concern to render subtle gradations of light and shade.

In his search for the most faithful possible rendering of his coloristic richness into linear black and white, he helped to train a galaxy of engravers, including Cornelis Galle, the Bolswert brothers, Lucas Vorstermans and Paulus Pontius. These engravers took the rapid sketches he prepared for his friend Balthasar Moretus, who had inherited the Plantin press, and completed them in accordance with his instructions. These sketches became the sumptuous title pages which lent the books coming off Plantin's presses their entirely new, pure baroque style.

Rubens was a draughtsman of astonishing skill. When preparing his portraits, he would make a study of the model from life, thereby enabling us to gauge just how much liberty he took when he came to apply the paint. Here too, his powerfully decorative style helped save his models from banality. What is most striking in these sketches, which usually served as a guide for the final composition, is his sureness of touch. Everything fell into place at once; there was no need for second thoughts. The sketches, done on little wood panels, with brush and sepia, with the occasional underscoring of colour here and there, furnish striking evidence of Rubens' genius. Even at this stage, everything was already in its intended place, and the final painting could be executed to scale from these invaluable documents.

On more than one occasion, as we have seen, the paintings were done by teams of assistants, with the master adding the finishing touches. Not that there was ever any attempt to deceive the client. Rubens graded the prices of his work according to whether it was entirely "by his hand", as he put it, or simply supervised or revised by him.

In any case, the skill of his assistants was such that specialists still argue over who exactly did what.

One expert tried to sidetrack the problem by asserting that, with two exceptions—which were undeniable on account of evidence that has survived in Rubens' correspondence—all the paintings were by the master himself. But this view is untenable. The fact is, Rubens relied heavily on his assistants, and painted very few works entirely by himself. This in no way detracts from his creative genius, one of the greatest in the history of art.

■ **Roger Avermaete**

Photos Unesco

Letters to the editor

THE ACROPOLIS IN DANGER

Sir,

A short while ago, a terrible photograph appeared in the newspapers. It showed the Acropolis, in Athens, trapped in an enormous semi-transparent plastic bubble, through which the famous monuments appeared dimly, as if seen in a mist.

This "artist's impression" purported to show the most effective and—according to its inventors—the easiest way of protecting the Acropolis from the effects of pollution.

But no one who knows what the Acropolis means to the world, and no one who has seen for himself the sunlight of Greece playing on the marble of its monuments, could countenance such an imprisonment, even as a last, desperate measure of protection.

That is why I was pleased to read, in the February 1977 issue of the *Unesco Courier*, the appeal by Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow—Unesco's Director-General—for an international campaign to save the monuments of the Acropolis.

There is hope, then, that the Parthenon, the Erechtheum, the Propylaea and the temple of Athena Nike will be saved, without recourse to plastic.

I look forward to reading the *Unesco Courier's* forthcoming issue devoted to the Acropolis. There can be no doubt that by calling attention again to the site's historic importance and to the problems of its preservation, you will alert world opinion, and make the public even more receptive to Mr. M'Bow's appeal.

Jean Sam Curtet
Nyon, Switzerland

Editor's note: *The Greek authorities have rejected as unfeasible a plan to cover the Acropolis monuments with a giant glass dome to save them from pollution decay.*

LEVIATHAN LIVES ON

Sir,

Your January 1977 issue ("Who Owns the Oceans?") contains a caption on whales which is misleading.

It is not true to state that "all species of great whales are threatened with extinction because of intensive whaling." Indeed, the only species so threatened is Bryde's Whale *(Balaenoptera edeni),* a tropical species which is taken mainly by nations not party to the International Whaling Convention.

Nor is it true to state that "no measurable increase has occurred in the numbers of the [totally] protected species [of great whales]."

Humpback whales in the North Atlantic have been protected since 1955, blue whales since 1960. Humpback whales in the Northwest Atlantic are numerous, probably numbering 1500 or more. The number of blue whales in the same area is not known accurately, but strandings induced by ice are now an annual phenomenon in southwest Newfoundland.

Rate of increase, clearly, will be a function of the residual population at time of protection and time elapsed since protection, and will follow the kind of curve expected of an animal population.

Dr. D.E. Sergeant
Member, Whale Research Group,
International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN)
Ste. Anne de Bellevue
Montreal, Canada

ESPERANTO AND WORLD COMMUNICATION

Sir,

I am rather surprised that your April 1977 issue about world communication contains no reference to the international language, Esperanto, invented by Dr. Zamenhof towards the end of the last century.

Being completely regular in grammatical construction, and for other reasons, it is much easier to learn than any national language. It has the added advantage of being "neutral", so that its use does not excite national sensitivities.

R.D.Y. Perrett
Sheffield, U.K.

UNESCO MEDAL FOR RUBENS YEAR

To mark the 400th anniversary of Rubens' birth, Unesco has issued a commemorative medal in gold, silver and bronze. The medal (see opposite page) shows on one side a bust of Rubens, after his self-portrait in the Rubens' House, Antwerp. On the other is a mother and infant from a Rubens drawing, "Maternity", in the Louvre, bearing the inscription "Pietro Pauolo Rubens" in the style of his signature. During a ceremony at Brussels on 21 April, the first gold medal to be struck was presented to King Baudouin of Belgium by a delegation led jointly by Mr. Makaminan Makagiansar, Unesco's Assistant Director-General for Culture and Communication and by Mr. Felipe Herrera, Chairman of the Administrative Council of the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture.

Proceeds from the sale of the medal, designed by Serge Santucci (France) and struck by the French mint, will be used to assist the training of young artists from developing countries.

The medal can be obtained from:

The Philatelic Service of Unesco,
7, Place de Fontenoy,
75700 Paris;

Monnaies et Médailles du Monde,
24, Rue Royale,
75008 Paris;

or from Belgian banks.

Prices are as follows:		
Gold 900/1,000, Ø 23 mm, 7.5 g	**455 French francs**	**(3370 Belgian francs)**
(with chain ring)	**500 FF**	**(3705 FB)**
Silver 925/1,000, Ø 41 mm, 30 g	**135 FF**	**(1000 FB)**
(with chain ring)	**145 FF**	**(1075 FB)**
Bronze Ø 59 mm, 100 g	**60 FF**	**(445 FB)**
(with chain ring)	**70 FF**	**(520 FB)**
Complete series in a box	**670 FF**	**(4965 FB)**
(with chain ring)	**735 FF**	**(5445 FB)**

BOOKSHELF

RECENT UNESCO BOOKS

■ **New Trends in Integrated Science Teaching, Volume IV: Evaluation of Integrated Science Education,** edited by David Cohen. (Based on the proceedings of an international symposium held in Oxford, U.K., in 1975). 1977, 199 pp. (38 F).

■ **Communication Policies in Costa Rica,** by Jaime M. Fonseca. 1977, 89 pp. (16 F).

■ **Science and Technology in the Development of the Arab States.** (No. 41 in Unesco's "Science Policy Studies and Documents" series). 1977, 327 pp. (30 F).

■ **The Economics of New Educational Media.** A reference book on the cost effectiveness of different media approaches to education. ("Educational Methods and Techniques" series, No. 1). 1977, 200 pp. (36 F).

■ **In-service Training of Teachers in Sri Lanka,** by K.D. Ariyadasa. 1976, 56 pp. (7 F); **Examination Reforms in Sri Lanka,** by B. Premaratne. 1976, 49 pp (6 F); **Management of Educational Reforms in Sri Lanka,** by K.D. Ariyadasa. 1976, 41 pp. (6 F); **Integrated Approach to Curriculum Development in Primary Education in Sri Lanka,** by K. Peiris. 1976, 25 pp. (6 F); **Integrated Science in the Junior Secondary School in Sri Lanka,** by A.M. Ranaweera. 1976, 31 pp. (6 F). A series of studies on Sri Lanka's major educational reforms of 1972. Unesco: International Bureau of Education (IBE) "Experiments and Innovations in Education" series, Nos. 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27.

■ **A Comprehensive Plan for the Global Investigation of Pollution in the Marine Environment and Baseline Study Guidelines.** (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Technical Series, No. 14). 1976, 42 pp. (6 F).

■ **An Alternative Pattern of Basic Education. Radio Santa Maria,** by Robert White. A study on Radio Santa Maria, which provides an education service for the rural adult population of the Dominican Republic. (Unesco: IBE "Experiments and Innovations in Education" series, No. 30). 1976, 122 pp. (15 F).

■ **Mediterranean Forests and Maquis: Ecology, Conservation and Management.** 1977, 79 pp. (14 F); **Human Population Problems in the Biosphere: Some Research Strategies and Designs,** edited by Paul Baker. 1977, 82 pp. (16 F); **Dynamic Changes in Terrestrial Ecosystems: Patterns of Change, Techniques for Study and Application to Management,** edited by R.O. Slatyer. 1977, 30 pp. (6 F) Nos. 2, 3 and 4 in Unesco's "MAB Technical Notes" series. (MAB = Man and the Biosphere, Unesco's international programme of global research on the interactions between man and the environment.)

UNESCO NEWSROOM

Dictionary of African Biography

The first volume (Ethiopia-Ghana) of the *Dictionary of African Biography* was presented to Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of Unesco, on 19 April 1977 by Professor Ofosu-Appiah, Director of the *Encyclopaedia Africana* secretariat. The first of 20 volumes being written under the direction of the *Encyclopaedia Africana* secretariat in Accra (Ghana) it contains 290 biographies of noted African figures from Ethiopia and Ghana (living persons not included). Vol. I can be obtained from Reference Publications Inc., 218 St. Clair River Drive, Algonac, Michigan 48001, U.S.A., price $59.95 per copy. (For orders outside U.S.A. add $3 per copy for shipping.) The 20-volume set can also be ordered at a specially reduced pre-publication price of $49.95 per volume (plus $3 per volume for shipping costs outside U.S.A.). Prices subject to change for later volumes if printing costs increase.

30 years of international co-operation in flying

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. A specialized agency of the United Nations with 136 Member States, its objectives are to develop the principles and techniques of international air navigation and to foster the planning and development of international air transport. It is currently playing an active role in providing technical assistance for aviation projects within the framework of the U.N. family's programme of aid to developing countries.

Centenary of sound recording

The centenary of the invention of recorded sound was celebrated recently at Unesco's Paris headquarters at a ceremony organized jointly by the International Federation of Producers of Phonograms and Videograms (IFPI) and the International Music Council (IMC). The French poet Charles Cros invented a phonograph in 1877, the same year in which Thomas Edison of the U.S.A. made his first recording. During the ceremony, Mr. John E. Fobes, Unesco's Deputy Director-General, drew attention to Unesco-sponsored conventions and agreements protecting recordings and facilitating their circulation, and stressed the importance of recording in conserving and making known "unwritten music, so rich in many countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America".

U.N. stamp honours Security Council

This stamp honouring the United Nations Security Council is one of a set issued by the U.N. Postal Administration on 27 May 1977. It is a tribute to the work of the body on which the U.N.'s Member States have conferred the primary responsibility for maintaining peace and security. Designed by G. Hamori (Australia), the stamp renders the idea of security through two stylized hands protecting the U.N. emblem, symbol of the universe.

New catalogue of U.N. stamps

A new list of U.N. stamps issued during the first 25 years (1951-1976) of existence of the United Nations Postal Administration has just been published. It is available (in English only) from the U.N. Postal Administration, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland (price $0.75).

India's gift to save Moenjodaro in Pakistan

The Indian government has contributed $50,000 to Unesco's International Campaign to safeguard the 5,000-year-old site of Moenjodaro in Pakistan, one of the largest known examples of early Bronze Age town planning. The International Campaign was launched to raise a minimum $5 million of the estimated $11 million needed to preserve Moenjodaro from destruction. Total contributions pledged or received now stand at $650,000.

Dinosaurs and drifting continents

A piece of fossilized bone, recently discovered on the Isle of Wight (U.K.), is believed to be part of the tail of a giant *Diplodocus* dinosaur. A complete skeleton of a *Diplodocus* was unearthed in Wyoming (U.S.A.) at the turn of the century. The new find suggests that this prehistoric creature also existed in what is now Europe, and supports the theory that Europe and America were once joined in a single landmass that later split and drifted apart.

Flashes...

■ *The Paris mint has issued a medal to mark the 300th anniversary of Spinoza's death.*

■ *Schistosomiasis, or snail fever, is endemic in 71 countries, infecting about 200 million people, reports WHO. The disease is spreading and its severity increasing.*

■ *The water used by 90 per cent of the population of the developing world is either unsafe or inadequate, or both, reports UNICEF.*

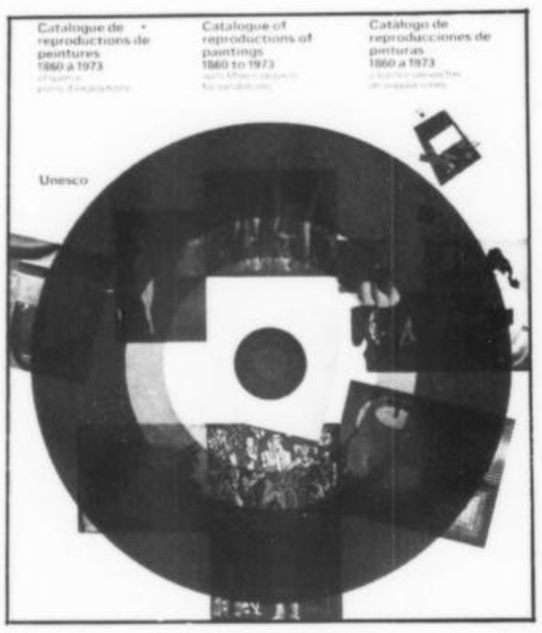
■ *As part of its "philatelic year" Sweden is issuing a special stamp to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Uppsala University.*

■ *The U.S. alligator has been saved from extinction after 20 years of efforts by conservationists and officials, reports U.N.* Development Forum.

■ *UNICEF is helping to sink some 310,000 shallow wells in Bangladesh (from 1972 to 1980) for supplying safe drinking water to rural communities.*

TWO UNESCO BOOKS ON PAINTING

Catalogue of reproductions of paintings 1860 to 1973 with fifteen projects for exhibitions



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1974
221 pp., 340 illustrations
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SELF-PORTRAIT OF RUBENS, PAINTED WHEN HE WAS AGED ABOUT 60, A FEW YEARS BEFORE HIS DEATH.